THOUGHT OF THOUGHTS

BOOK FOUR: FLAT SOLIDS

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Book **S**ix: **F**LAT **S**OLIDS

THOUGHT OF THOUGTS

Book 1: *Be-lie-ve*
Book 2: *Am I Me?*
Book 3: *Perhappiness*
Book 4: *The Veil Betwixt*
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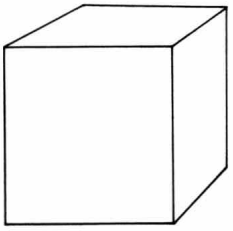

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1: FLAT SOLIDS

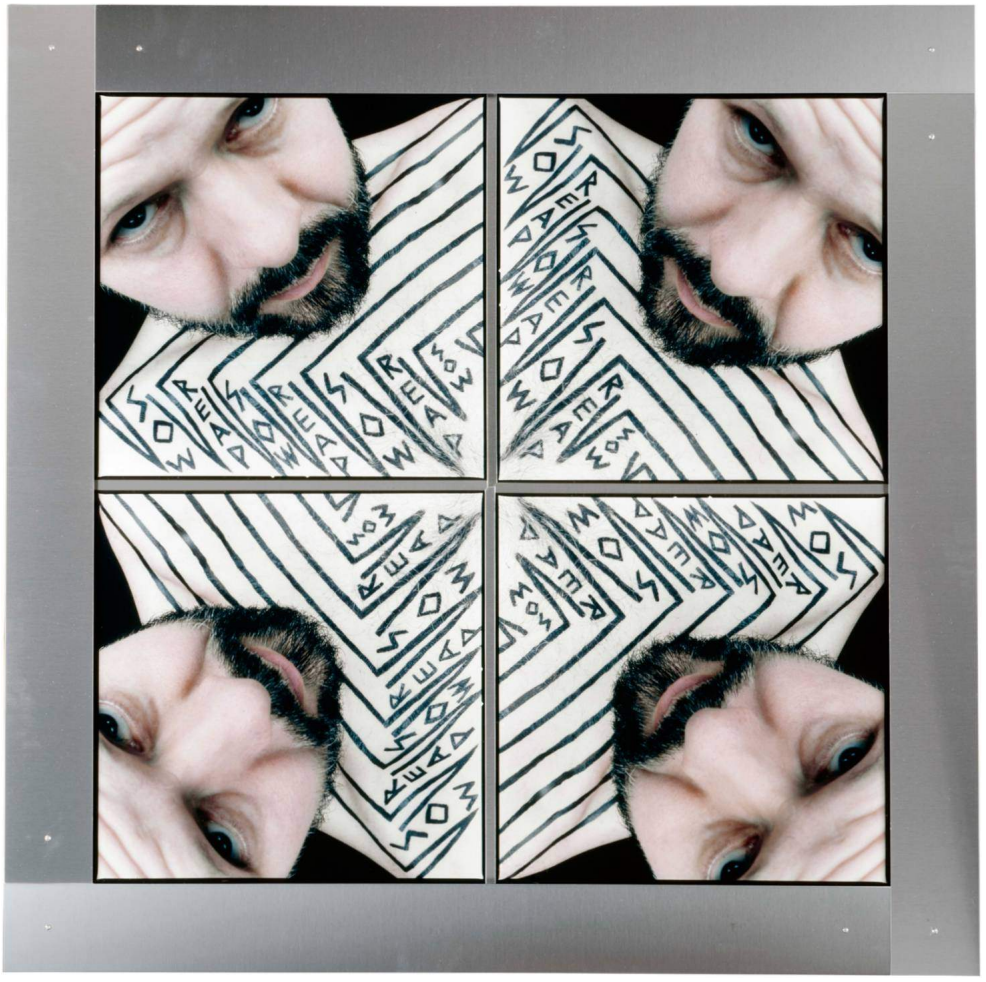
Valeriy's metal sculptures were destined to enter our photographic oeuvre in a distinctive, integral manner when we began extending its form and meaning to the three-dimensional world of objects. Our latest series, *Photoreliefs*, has its origins in the early nineties and unites photography with metal reliefs. In addition to introducing volume to flat images, this method integrates two seemingly different but nevertheless related principles: metal sculpting and photography – something like a chalice and wine, which is difficult to imagine outside of any vessel. Thus, the content and the container were combined into a single entity, exhibiting both the plasticity of the images, a surreal blending of reality and fantasy, and the strength and firmness of their metal casing presentation.

The earliest examples of that shift toward metal constructions were cluster installations with kaleidoscopic effects and structural compositions. That was repeated in some works, like *Saw-Reap*, which violated the standard "etiquette" of photography. The "quadrophonic" composition

An Organic Union, installation view of the joint retrospective exhibition, left: metal sculptures by Valeriy, right: joint photographic work, Fine Arts Museum of Long Island, Hempstead, NY, 1991

shows a semi-algebraic model encompassing the four cardinal directions. The square roots of the words “sow” and “reap” shoot their fractals in a chain reaction, just as each branch might alter the course of another in the *Tree of Life.* Touch that string, and a destiny instantly changes for better or worse. As in the old saying, sow a thought, reap a deed, sow a deed, reap a tendency, sow a tendency, reap a personality, sow a personality, reap a destiny. In other words, what you give is what you receive, for karma will always find us.

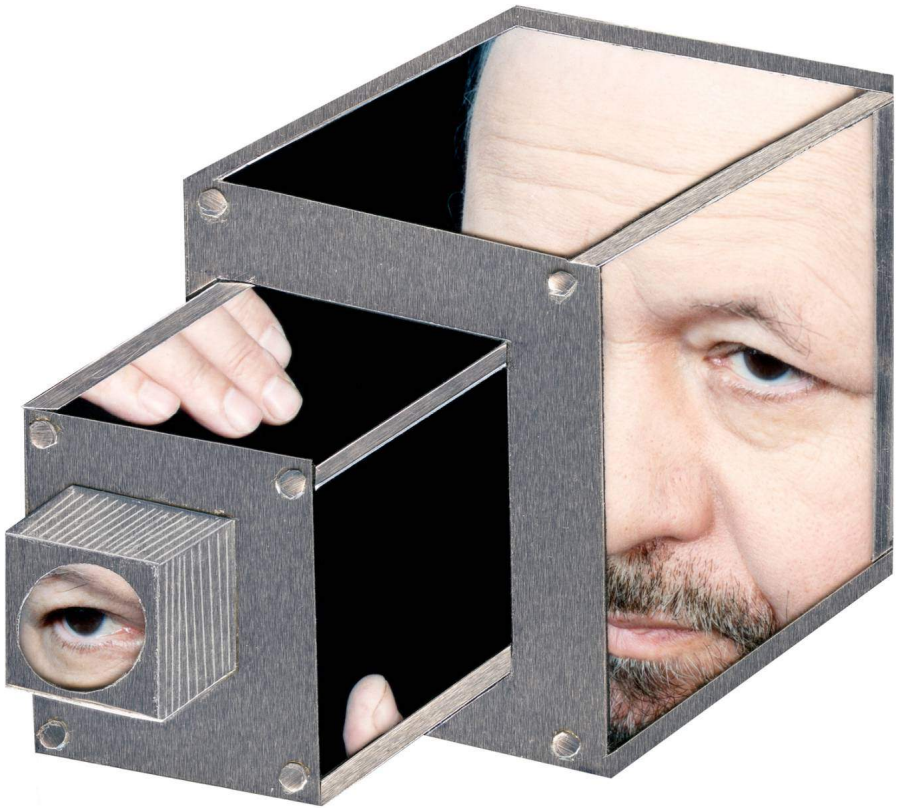
Saw - Reap © 1991, C-prints in stainless steel construction, 122 x 122 cm, collection of Progressive Corporation, OH, USA



The three-stage artistic process, idea - creation - result, reflects the three interlaced layers of existence, intellectual - sensory - physical. Each of them corresponds to a particular level of consciousness. Their three different projections in life are intertwined into an organic whole, and *Photoreliefs* are most revealing in this case. First, the ideas are born in the mind, and then they are processed into the photo concepts, which, in turn, "solidify" into sculptural objects. Thus, the inner and the outer worlds are bridged through conceptual, aesthetic, and "hands-on" methods. As in the other series, *Photoreliefs* include several sub-series, such as *Flat Solids*, *Unfolded Reliefs*, *Circles*, *Cutouts*, *Superstrings*, and other reliefs unclassifiable due to their extraordinariness. While endowing the images with volume and depth, we've also sought to adhere to the rules of photography, and here is how.

The sequence of *Flat Solids* is based on optical illusion.

Reflection © 1992, photos, metal



Cameraman © 2008, photos, metal, engraving

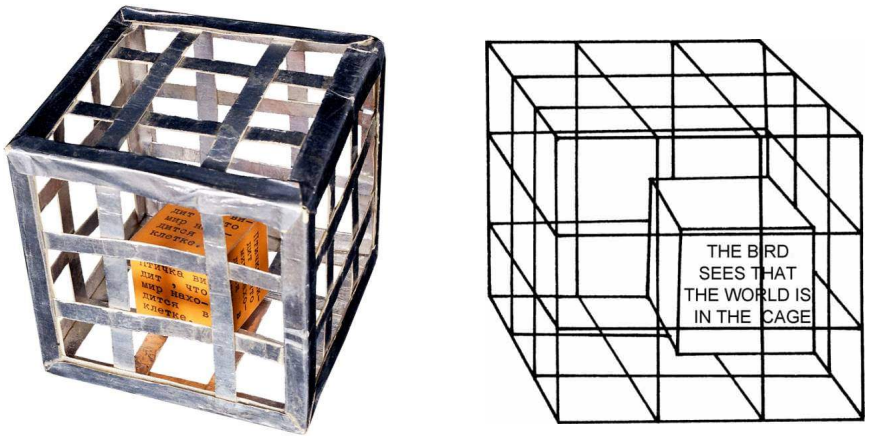
While the pieces look like three-dimensional bodies at first glance, they belong to the same "flatland" of photography, for their metal geometrical constructions are actually two-dimensional. The works do not present a vast expanse of photosphere but concentrate on concepts, drawing a psychological parallel between three slices of reality: physical material, imaginative psychological, and esoterically insightful. The single eye of a *Cameraman* can transform life into a moment of brilliance, whatever the words might mean. Such exaggeration may be rescued by the metaphor for the spiritual eye substituting the physical one, while both types of vision, should they interact and stimulate each other, would be best. In this way, the power of the creative mind can be appropriately applied in sympathy with the physical effort.

As the change in us gradually took place, it was usually reflected in the new sequence of artworks, which superseded the previous ones. The series *Flat Solids* came during the usual "reconstitution." Some of these works had a fully developed body of the cube, while others just hinted at it. At first glance, the flat cubes, with metal frames measuring 122 x 122 cm, looked like three-dimensional objects on the wall. The idea was to bring some volume to the images, to make them more than flat photographs as if folding their planes into cubes. These cubistic forms had to be consistent with the rules of photography without violating its *vita integra*. We did not know how we knew this; we simply did. It was somewhat predictable that the cube could be the most suitable body for volumetric photo illusions due to its magical presence in our earlier work.

The metaphoric impact of these homo-cubes does not

Yogi in a Silver Cage © 1995, photo, metal

inhibit the possibility of their polyvalent interpretation, including crude approximations of reality, sometimes merging in a kind of geometric surrealism. There are two ways of seeing: one is of an artist and the other of a viewer, and both can be reversed. For instance, can you imagine yourself at the moment of finding yourself within the latticed cube of *Yogi in a Silver Cage?* The sense of reality can rise and fall, but its experience is within the mind, provoking a craving for emancipation, individualization, and knowledge. The physical body veils the psychic aspect, which leads to the awareness of transcendence via interior, intuitive ways.



R. G., *The Bird Sees That the World Is in the Cage,* 1974, cardboard, wood, paper, foil, 8 cm^3

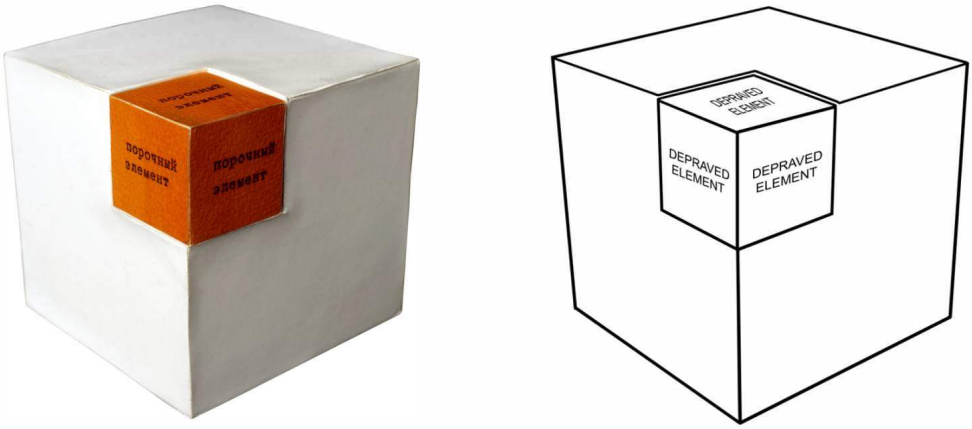
Playing such subtext, turned here into a picture, we encapsulated the yogini's body in the fractal cube – mortals are framed in matter, where gradually shrinking time is steadily eroding life. Looking at the image through layers and layers of matter, envisioned in *Yogi in a Silver Cage* as multiple squares of metal frame, one may notice that the whole has priority over the fractal parts related to many sensory components. In the alchemical argot, *homo quadratus* is someone in whom the progressive working of spirit

signals an ascent in consciousness, regenerating the self. When an enormous number of brain functions work in parallel, its network can be mapped metaphorically by the reality-testing structure of the cage of matter. Despite the physical discomfort instinctively associated with the posture outlined by the hair, the yogini seems to exhibit autostability. The posture that is difficult to assume initially becomes comfortable, dissolving any attention to one's body. Sitting in a steady position, breathing slowly and imperceptibly, immobilizes yogis' minds, which can reach supra-conscious concentration and pure self-identification with this experience. In a mythological sense, many centuries may pass in the yogis' minds while only an hour passes for their bodies, and waking

Rimma with cubes made in 1974-76; many of them are in the collections of The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow; The Centre Pompidou, Paris; The Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna; Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ; Museo d'Arte Moderna, Trento e Rovereto, Italy.

from their dreams of enlightenment, they find that they have not the temporal time but the whole of it – no dividing line between time and eternity. That is how the mystic powers of the yogis were described. And as enticing as it sounds, one must return to one's unfinished timeline to reintegrate its upward, circular, or reverse flows with the present reality.

It is worth mentioning that the *Flat Solids* series is rooted visually in Rimma's three-dimensional poetry. Back in Moscow, the solid body of a cube served as a vessel or, rather, a container for her conceptual poetry (more in *Thought of Thoughts*, Book 2: *Trespassing*, pp. 83 -190). These poems



R. G., *Depraved Element* © 1974, cardboard, wood, paper, 8 cm^3

were generally "clothed" in small square boxes with text inside and outside. Bearing the elements of poetry set in the object of art, these cubes were like materialized haiku; they spoke in the language of coded simplicity when metaphorical clarity did not contradict the ambiguity.

The white cube with the orange *Depraved Element* is one of the early examples. As a cube, it represents one of the five absolute Platonic solids. However, if one removes the small orange block symbolizing a depraved element, the perfect shape of that Platonic body is ruined. Every truth has a grain of mistake, and every mistake can have a grain of

truth. Does this mean that the world is governed by chance and error? It depends on the degree of one's openness toward the archetypal. The world is full; there are no empty niches, and a definite hierarchy governs the scope of ideas, beings, and things. And some of them can be quite depraved. But exactly how these contradictive forces work together and shape the round world (presented in a square format in this cube) is largely a mystery to us.

As a conceptual piece, the cubic *Depraved Element* presents an abstract portrait of someone with deviating traits of one's character that is truly faceless yet suggests a certain archetype. The metal construction titled *Cube Insider*, made

Cube Insider © 2008,
photo, brushed metal

34 years later, developed the subject in a completely different direction. Geometrically, its alleged “depraved” element is reversed: a convex form turns concave. Besides, the *Cube Insider* is not faceless but quite a pensive man with an expression that does not openly display his emotions. The face is an index of the mind. Like a latter-day Diogenes, the insider is encapsulated in the cube, in a kind of cerebral closet, trying to put his thoughts in order, not to be influenced by their endless succession. Do we have to think all the time? Briefly recall that the cube was considered a symbol of stability and conventional logic in a material sense. Hence, mental stability, as a sustainable quality, might somehow prevent the

Homo © 1992, photos, metal, pencil shading

rising chaos in the mixed-up brain from circulating its mixed-up ideas and theories. Re-examining its own rationalizations about life – one guess is as good as another – any smart mind, tangled in logic, can make reasonable whatever it wills.

Now, turning off all inferior things, let's look at the *Cube Insider* differently, as mentally alert and possessing the natural gift for abstract thinking. We see a man given to meditation on the mysteries of the beginning of life; hence, the egg is in the picture. The mind does not know enough about the unknowable and tries to analyze, reason, and apply intelligence. It can become one-pointed – the egg is that point, a centerpiece of the cube. By fixing on some object until the mind mentally unites with this object and its secrets, one can dematerialize it. This ability to focus, the sixth limb of yoga called *dharana,* is defined by an unwritten law, claiming that any personal mind is but a part of the universal mind.

In the composition of *H_2O,* we tried to unite a fluid indefinite form with the precise geometrical formation featuring pseudo-water in a pseudo-cube. The whirlpool of the "great deep" is created out of hair and "incubated" in the flat "aquarium." The architectonic arrangement of liquid hair presents perturbation of water, only skin-deep chaos. Beneath it is an intricate structure of regular periodic motion or, in other words, the universal matrix of the "great deep" in its receiving and creative state. Water that always follows the path of least resistance is depicted alive in perpetual circulation. Marked with the chemical seal of H_2O, the alchemical *aqua permanens* (enduring water) turns the wheel of the moon calendar. The circulation of the vast water substance is similar to an endless rotation in the *Möbius Strip,* in which a two-dimensional surface crashes into three-dimensional space.

In mythology, the primordial waters, from which all things arise and to which they will be returned, are never stagnated, glacier, or salty like the Dead Sea. The same water temporarily assumes the form of a wave, rising and falling, merging with water. Its multipurpose flexibility and liquidity are essential to developing all life forms. Moisture is the field for preparing an embryo, a new fruit of a new crop. The shoreless liquidity, incubated into one of the perfect solids, indicates not so much physical substance as the metaphysical

idea behind it. The square bath of square water is prepared for rinsing and irrigating dusty soil, as water of life in a world gone dry. The *aqua vitae* not only is live water; it gives life, in which the second, third, and fourth dimensions are interrelated, just like a wheel within a wheel. (This reflection does not need its author, for it has a life of its own in the imagina-

H_2O © 1990-94, photos,
stainless steel, 122 x 122 cm

tion of today's savants.) Every living creature on the way of its formation plunges into a liquid phase and, after passing through pre-birth darkness and its chaos, is preserved like a single drop of water – each helps to swell the ocean. Despite all the imperfections and inconsistencies of art, visual images can give a clue to abstract ideas and subsequent analogies. With an acceleration of the rotation, one is pooled toward one's own center of an indefinite beginning, merging with an

undeterminable end. Nothing is dead when the whirlpool dies in the water; on the contrary, it is a sign of a new perspective.

Niagara Falls, 1988

The waterfall consists of drops that fall and disappear, being renewed over and over again. Such is life - the formation of an uninterrupted new beginning of an uninterrupted inevitable end. In our context, the notions of "beginning" and "end" are just conceptualizations. The cascades of a real waterfall show the succession of moments passing by and immediately reconstruct themselves – no division between ripples and water. Invoking this principle, the long curly hair slides down the steps of our *Waterfall* created from the filamentous structure of flaxy hair, waving merely metaphorical ripples of water. Human presence makes it fresh and full of living energy, suggesting one more analogy - the "waterfall" of thoughts coming from the subconscious region. According to mythology, latent knowledge of nature and its power were hidden in the fluvial hair of various personages, such as Biblical Samson or Nordic goddess Freyja. To Virgil's everlasting credit, a sacrificial forelock was cut from many heads as an offering to the subterranean queen Proserpine, who released the spirit from the dead body *(Aeneid,* iv. 702-5). But if we are to add scientific ballast to this fount of fantasies, we must mention that hair contains electrons and is a perfect conductor of static electricity due to its high electrostatic charge. Imagine a waterfall upside-down.

What goes $\begin{matrix} down \\ up \end{matrix}$ *must come* $\begin{matrix} up \\ down \end{matrix}$ *over and over,*

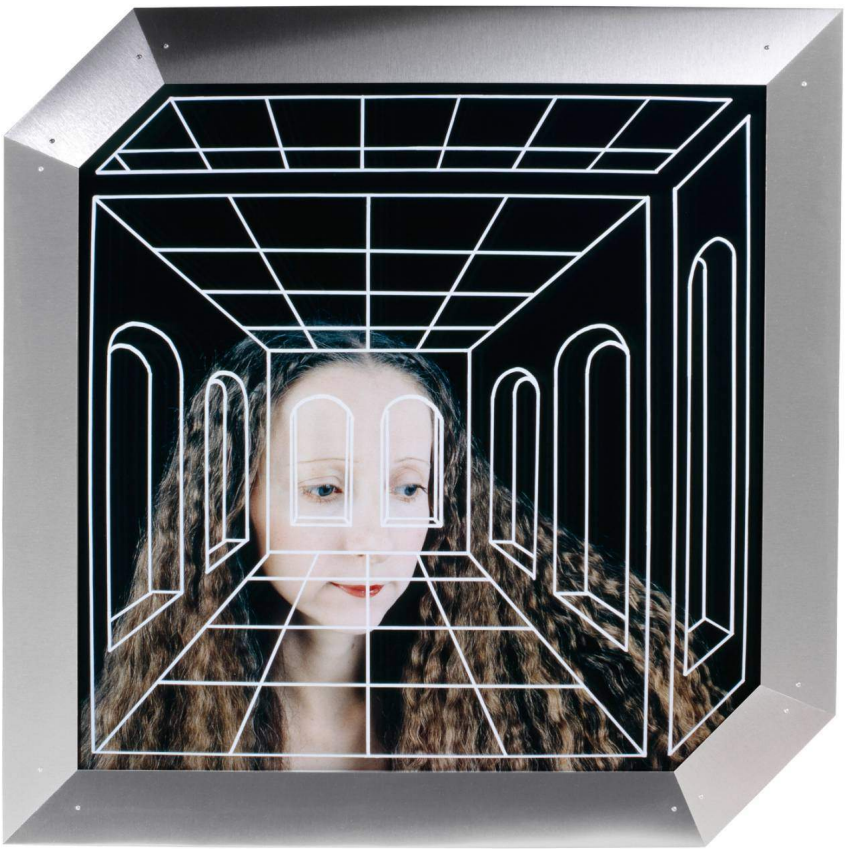
On a personal level, *Waterfall* is one more visual metaphor for the "structural chaos" of the irrepressible stream of life

and the arrangement of that stuff, which likes to be uncontrollable. It often happens that symbols attract things they symbolize, and vice versa; things evoke their symbols. Many visual metaphors come from our life experience; one is the photorelief *Waterfall*, showing an eruption of hair falling down the stepped slopes of a metal structure. Carefully observing the movement of the water of Niagara Falls, we saw not only its mass but felt the dismemberment into fleeting components of this "thunder of water" (which is what Niagara means in the language of the local Indian tribe). By analogy, each individual life might be seen as a separate drop formed by living water and consequently dissolved in it. The shape of each drop is aerodynamically optimal, as hydraulic experts inform us. The shaky law of coincidences helped us to look more precisely at the meaning of this "watery" subject, inspiring us to put another individual drop in its deep waters.

Waterfall © 1993, photos, metal

In the photorelief *Perspective,* the architectural perspective drawing creates the illusion of three-dimensionality. The face was photographed through the Plexiglas with the drawing of the *Quattrocento*-like panorama, in which the proportions between the real and the imagined, the face and the architectural structure, become adjusted. Here, the impersonal is configured through the personal and vice versa, creating a kind of artistic convergence between a man and his temple. As all old temples were conceived according to the canon of the scale of man himself, our *Perspective* follows the same rule. In the mental perspective of human intelligence, the laws of spatial and temporal illusions are also present. As always, man is the *measure* of all things in both

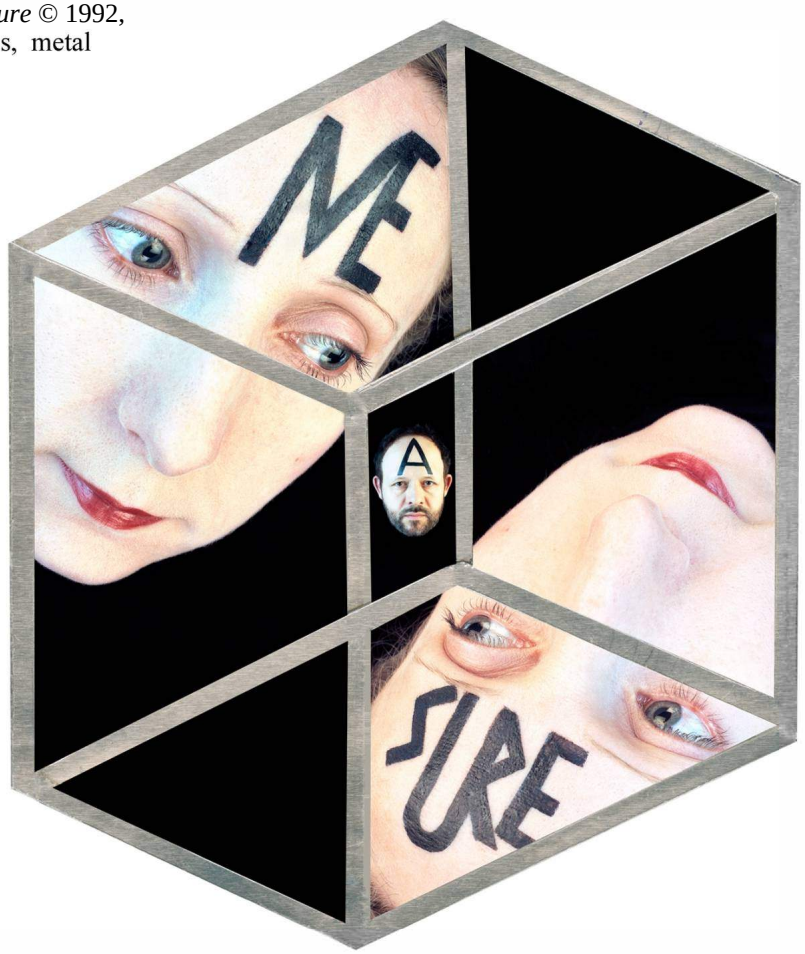
Perspective © 1992, photo, stainless steel, 122 x 122 cm



his life and his environment, no matter what he's preaching. Through this *measure*, we showed the virtual cathedral in perspective, with its principle of the space and time barriers of the parameters of our dimension.

The sacral architectural rules, known to the builders of the Gothic cathedrals in Europe and other great architects elsewhere, were just a frame of reference to the perfection and might of the Supreme. They kept the keys for the old masonry craft. An eye has to sink in the sacred optics of art and science to be guided by the beauty of spiritual proportions that do not cheat the sight. In the legacy of Genesis, God created man in his own image; following the same road, man created God in his own image, too. And his worshiping

Measure © 1992,
photos, metal



temple reflects the image of man himself, divinized into a stature of God.

Most of *Quattrocento's* perspective drawings showed buildings and their interiors filled with slanted "parallel" lines meeting somewhere in a vanishing point. Piero della Francesca was a particular master of the perspective both in a scenic view and in a mental vista. In his time, many perspective plans were drafted on the idea of a perfect city, which had many names, such as Magnesia of Plato or New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation. In a simple artifice arrangement of our *Perspective,* the architectural vista is measured through geometrical light patterns, creating an artistic crosscurrent of a man and his temple (referring to both genders). Rather than placing man in a temple, we moved the temple into the man. Such vision presents our physical space as an abstract geometrical system, breaking the rules for the finite expression of the infinite. To some extent, *Perspective* is a mirage, a panoramic projection of the soul into the pattern of her habituation, a house of life. The eyes are positioned in the central windows; the hair is running following the virtual trailing edges of this living space shaped as an alleged cube. *Tao Te Ching* says:

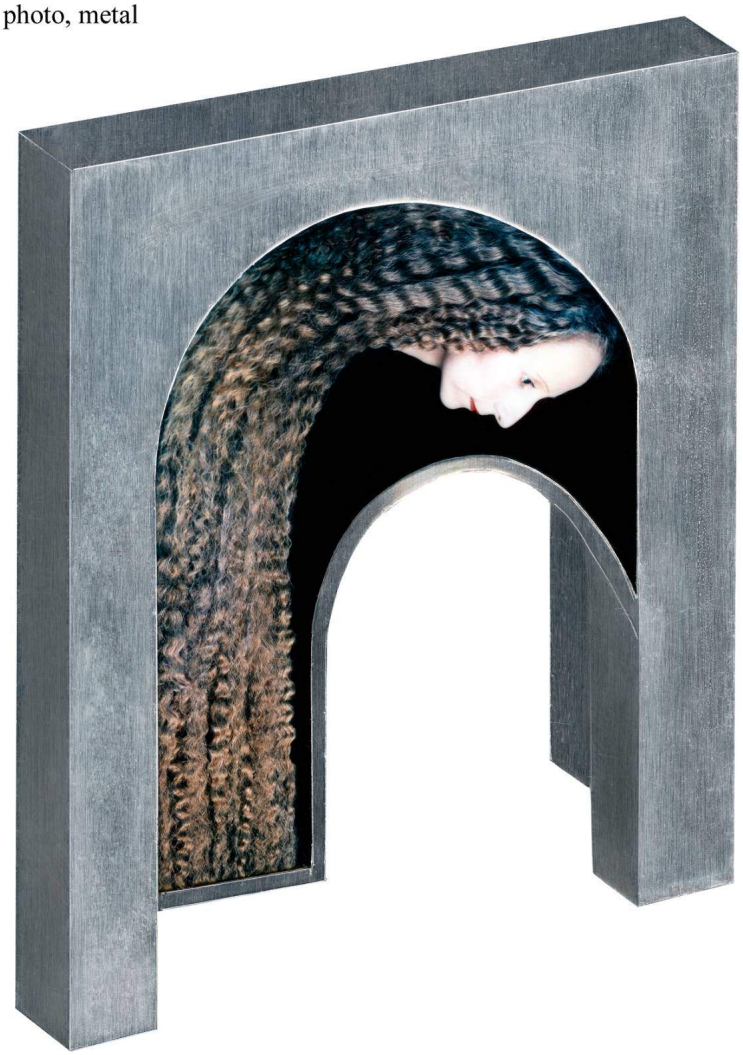
> "We make doors and windows for a room, but it is empty space that makes the room livable... The rhythm of entering and leaving takes place continually."

> "The Valley Spirit never dies.
> It is named the Mysterious Female.
> And the Doorway of the Mysterious Female
> Is the base from which Heaven and Earth sprang.
> It is there within us all the while;
> Draw upon it as you will; it never runs dry." [1]

These mysterious lines suggest a spatial model for the cerebral vision of the doors and windows on every possible side leading to the empty space called "wisdom" in the Orient, which somehow echoes the Delphic rule adapted in the Occident: "Man know thyself, and thou will know the universe and the Gods." In keeping with this motto, one can obtain the knowledge of free navigation in the Hindu Indra's Net, stroll safely in the Chinese Valley of Spirit, or even when

dragged to the level of the crowd, one can find a solution in the two symbolic words that came to us from antiquity – "know yourself' *(gnothi seauton,* Grk. and *nosce te ipsum,* Lat.). Inscribed above the entrance to the temple of Apollo in Delphi, they suggest the right perspective for a seemingly varnished point of sacred values of life analogous to finding the microcosm-macrocosm balance. This philosophic maxim hides the vista of the straight and narrow avenues that communicate between the seen and unseen. In the apocryphal texts, the classical axiom finds its further justification:

Triumphal Arch ©
2008, photo, metal



> "For he who has not known himself has known nothing, but who has known himself has at the same time already achieved knowledge about the depth of the all." [2]

The German mystic Jacob Böhme reiterated that message, suggesting that one must know one's two selves: the Christ-self and the self that fell with Adam. In keeping the consistency of our visual sermons, we cannot go deeper into a philosophical continuum reserved for different types of minds. All that we would like to say, relying on our art-related hermeneutics, is that "great work" must be performed in each of us individually if we want to unearth our original nature. We already have something archetypal beyond us, but we need to unwrap it through steps and stones of adversity. As expected, the degree of personal development determines the accuracy of any projection or vista of what is to be and comes to be. Such is the working tool of relative perspective called in the past the "most famous art of eyesight."

The direct grasp of eternal ideas is impossible when one is locked within the laws of our space-time-continuum. Hence, it may be conjectured that the creative arts can fill this gap in knowledge with imagination capable of time traveling between the worlds (and the words). More precisely, the *Flat Solid* titled *Was-Is-Will* presents the pseudo cube locking the mind within the space-time-continuum. The stainless steel ersatz of a three-dimensional form looks mechanically correct as a wound-up clock or musical box.

> "Like Friar Bacon's brazen head, I've spoken,
> 'Time is, Time was, Time's past'..."
> (Lord Byron, Don Juan, I, 217-218)

The time "truebles" – the subtlest deceptions of our 3D life – might be expressed in various ways: verbally, visually, mathematically, or blended together in one unit.

$$\sqrt{I} = \text{was} \qquad I = \text{am} \qquad I^2 = \text{will be}$$

What is the square root of "I" or "the self"? Equated to "was," it belongs to the past, or pursuant to grammar, the past tense of the self. The radical of 1 is 1, as in the biblical pronouncement "I am that I am." In contrast, $\sqrt{I}$, the radical of

Was-Is-Will © 1991, photo,
stainless steel, 122 x 122 cm

the self, is the notion of arbitrariness extending beyond math and ecclesiastic ideas. Let's look at the word "radical" (from "radix" or "root," Lat.) from a deviant perspective as something of an exceptional nature, say, a radical change in the past, like a high-voltage transformation. Many traumas are masked by an inverted radix of memory in the subconscious. Hence, one might find liberation in uprooting all these square roots of the self. Going down into its deep, one can encounter the very basic entity with all its obscurities hiding a memento of both the darkest dimension and its spiritual antipode, black and white holes of the subconscious. And all these forces dangerously play within the mind, waiting for its realization.

It is tempting to assume that the desire for self-understanding is at the bottom of the radical of √I, √you, or √anyone else. However, life itself is an enduring existential reality with all its unfathomable depth, the interpretation of which always remains uncertain.

There is an opinion that the whole past of the Earth is nothing but an unfolded present. According to the Buddhist view, past, present, and future exist simultaneously, as if to say they are always here now; everything is in a process: all verbs are in present continuous tense. And what about the future? By denying the future, one inevitably denies the present, thus denying the past. Raised to the second power as I^2 = will be, will one be squared again back to the beginning,

House of Memory © 1994,
photos, metal, pencil shading

repeating the existential cycle over and over? We can only hope that all changes are for the better. Perhaps the equation I^2 = will can continue rising to the second, third, and fourth power. Might it be a formula for the eventual liberation of the souls from the tellurian space-time-continuum? Whether incarnated in the future or "excarnated" in the past, the real self is said to be everlasting. However, this matter is debatable for many reasonable individuals because it has yet to be discovered empirically.

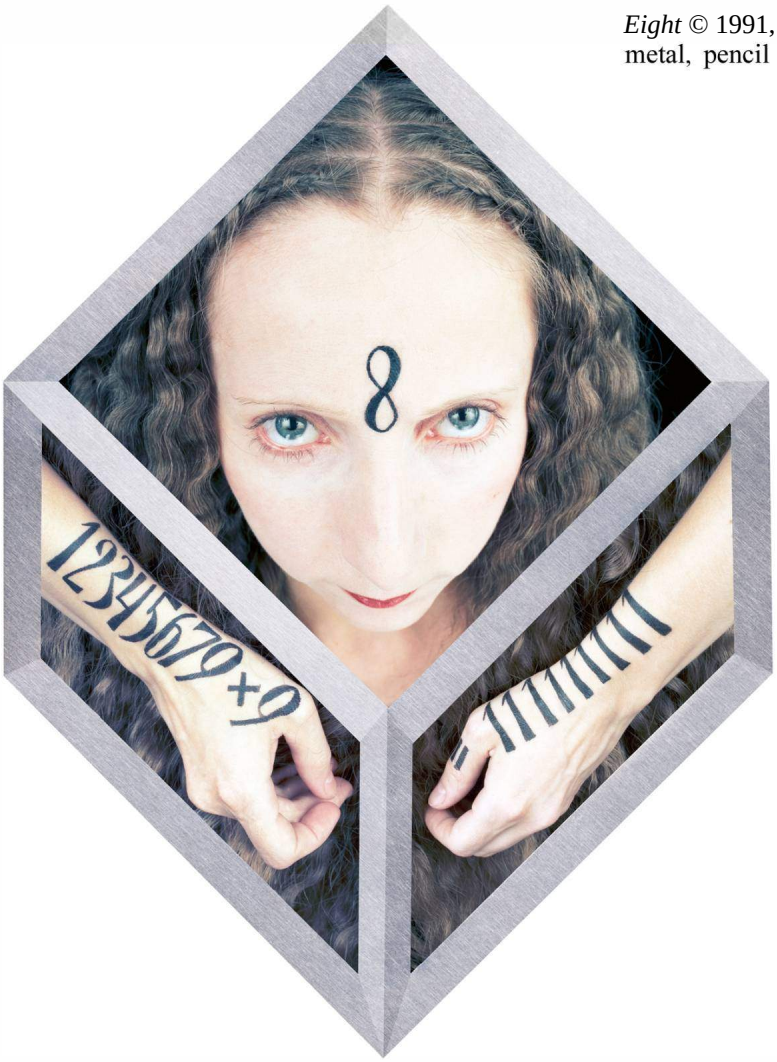
It suffices to say that we had a rooting interest not only toward words and their engaging "in-word-ness," but also toward number symbolism. The fascinating arithmetical con-

Cube © 2006, photo, metal, threads

sistency of 1 is depicted in the *Flat Solid,* titled *Eight,* for 8 is mysteriously missing in the sequence of numbers from 1 to 9:

12345679 x 9 = 111111111

With a ninety-degree turn, 8 can be converted into the sign of infinity; therefore, we put it where it belongs, namely on the forehead, leaving the arithmetical equation on the hands. Imagine that number 1 is animated into "I am." In this form of oneness, it becomes an existential unit representing the uniqueness of a personality. However, 111111111 indicates



Eight © 1991, photos, metal, pencil shading

breeding, multiplication, or replication, or at its worst, multiple personality disorder. If we are to find another articulation of this suggestion, the following poetic and somewhat cryptic composition might enlarge its meaning:

The seed of I-AM-NESS,
With its purpose and A-I'M
Sprouts out of I'M-ANATION
Into I'M II.

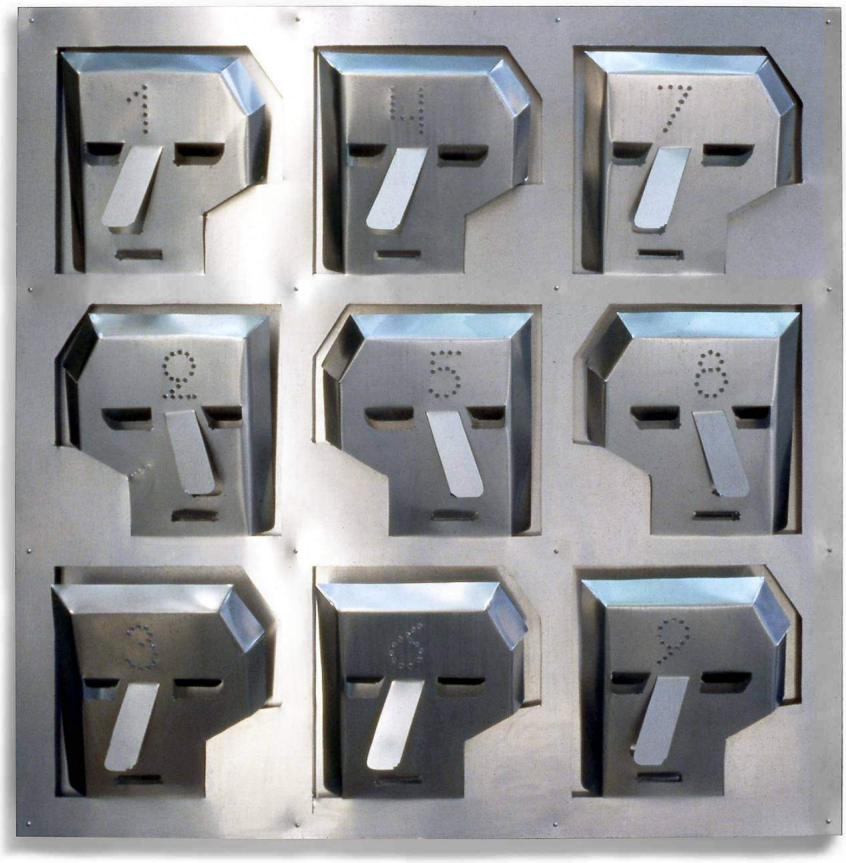
It turned out that our road toward spiritual identification was passing through the valleys of words and numbers, which appeared to us as peculiar entities or signals full of distinct meaning. Much of this was a subject of study and curiosity in the Middle Ages. For example, the sum of the numbers from 1 to 36 arranged in 6 x 6 rows of a magic square equals 666. In this composition, the sum of any row, column, or diagonal equals 111. For that reason, medieval scholars called it the "magic square of the sun" and associated it with the triplicate individuation of one, trice oneness harmonious by itself, similar to the Trinity. We'd like to think these ideas were not inherent impossibilities.

6	32	3	34	35	1
7	11	27	28	8	30
19	14	16	15	23	24
18	20	22	21	17	13
25	29	10	9	26	12
36	5	33	4	2	31

Valeriy used the language of numbers as a tissue for his concepts, which he engraved on his metal reliefs. *Homage to Pythagoras* depicts the smallest magic square, 3 x 3, in which all diagonal numbers add to the identical sum of 15, while the so-called androgynous number 5 is in the center. 5 is a circular number, in every multiplication terminating in 0 or 5, thus "restoring" itself. At the crossroads of all other numerals, it functions as a five-pointed star that traditionally symbolizes not only man but also a quintessential state.

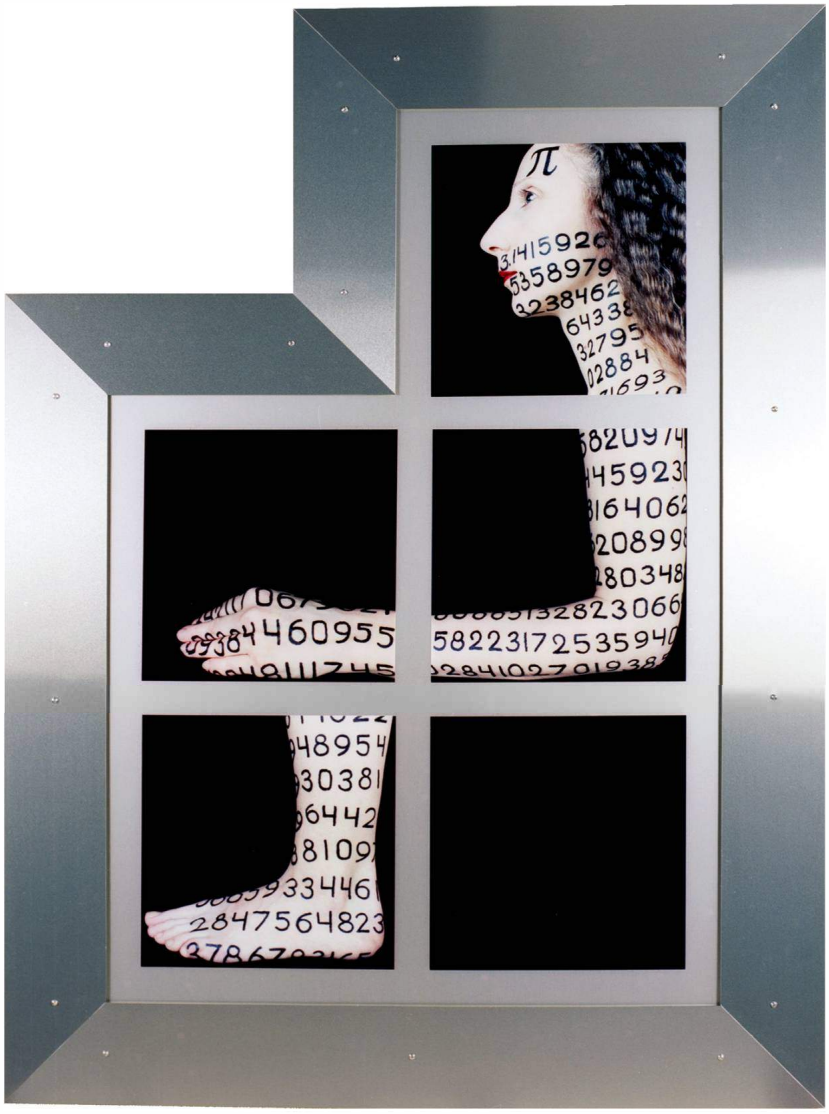
Naturally, the numbers found their way into our photography, as, for example, the irrational mathematical constant *Pi* in the architectonic photocomposition under the same title (the Greek letter "π" pronounced as "pi" is the first letter in the word *periphereia* meaning "circumference"). As it is known, the infinite is not exhausted by the infinite manifestation, as the Sun is not (yet) exhausted with its scattered raying. To continue the celestial analogy further, the universe can also be viewed as a "plasma" of endlessly never-exhausting and non-repeating fractions. Naturally, that "plasma" has its reflection in the human organism in a microcosmic sense. In that view, inscribing *Pi* on the human skin seems to extend

V. G., *Homage to Pythagoras,*1987,
aluminum, 122 x 122 x 18 cm



its transfinite message from strictly abstract to artistic parameters, reverting to the anthropomorphic principle. A human multicellular organism is equally paradigmatic and has an infinite number of "chips." These universal fractals are programmed or, roughly speaking, tattooed in the human mind. From here came the solution to a photographic image,

Pi © 1991/2007, photos,
aluminum, 122 x 92 cm



mottled with a transcendental message of *Pi*, which was translated from mathematical abstraction into the language of modern art, albeit with a certain amount of archaeology.

This "crazy" number was known in Ancient Egypt; this piece of information really intrigued us. In our image of *Pi*, the figure is frozen in an Egyptian pose, seemingly sitting on a throne. We needed only one arm and one leg to create this illusion. As a result, the photographic "bas-relief" covered with digital garlands appears almost incorporeal. At the same time, its static, pseudo-archeological composition is somewhat similar to the Ancient Egyptian block statues. These block figures were usually covered with inscriptions and looked like headed cubes. We "flattened" the block, visually reduced the number of the body limbs, giving them an ephemeral look without a body, and inscribed on them the infinite number. This way, the block stature lost its stony weight, but not the allusion. The image is focused and concentrated, eloquent without words, for it "talks" in numbers.

The irrational constant *Pi* is not used by chance; it serves the entire architectonics of the image. Like some kind of universal synthesizing force, it stretches into infinity, while the sequence of its numbers never even repeats itself. *Pi* is labeled as a transcendental number; it can be carried out to an infinite number of decimal places without ever arriving at a solution (its first 16 million digits have passed all the tests of randomness used on them so far). How can we multiply the infinite nonrepeating decimal *Pi* by itself, or any number multiplied by *Pi*, for that matter? What could "*Pi* times" mean? We cannot decipher those mysteries unless we find ourselves in a paradoxical frame of mind. However, for any mathematician, it does not sound in the least whimsical.

According to the old recipe, the proof of the *Pi* is in its eating, which the legions of circle-squarers tried to do. In its riddle known from time immemorial, they were looking for the answer to another similar riddle: the squaring of a circle.

The supposed solution known as squaring the circle was one of the most famous problems of antiquity *(Pi* is the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter; if the latter is equal to 1, the circumference is *Pi).* Yet, this number is above relation; it is a constant because it holds for all circles, symbolizing a universal synthesizing power. When applied to the art form of photography, the mathematical beauty of this number appears in tangible terms. The human element imparts a familiar, tactile quality to abstract mathematical ideas, which possess supreme austere perfection that talks mainly to the mind and does not descend to the level of feelings. It was said somewhere that the glory of the invisible world is hidden in symbols and numbers. Sometimes, for experimentation, they need a face to be perceptible.

Pages from *To Infinity and Beyond, Special Exhibition Resource Guide for Teachers,* The Heckscher Museum of Art, Huntington, NY, 2008, left: M.C. Escher,*Waterfall,* right: *Pi*

To Infinity and Beyond:
Mathematics in Contemporary Art

April 2003 - June 22,2003

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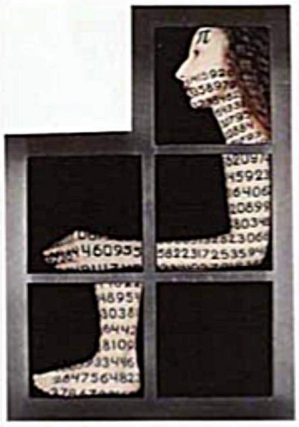

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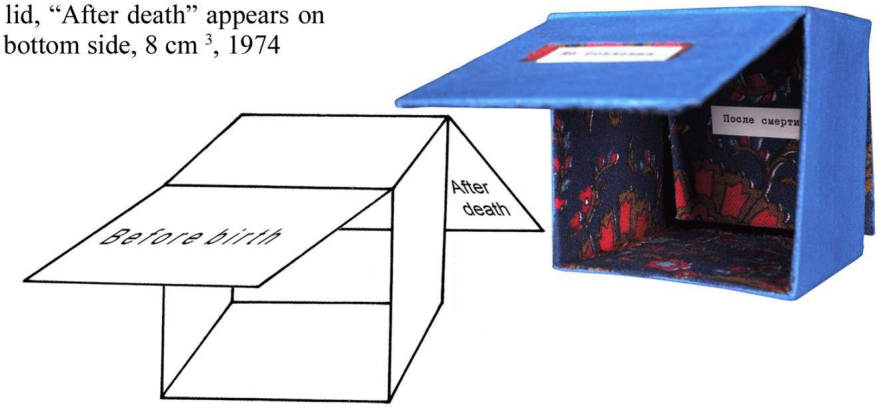
2: THE VOID

In our minds, the meaning of the word “dust” is proverbially connected with our mortal biosphere, life as such, with its progress and risks from start to finish. Interpreting this concept as broadly as possible, we must consider zodiacal dust in the solar system and beyond it, particularly a religious-mythological pattern of the origin of life. In the beginning, there was chaos and dust, not a sign of day or night, neither the sky nor a below, neither being nor not-being. Creation appeared from that nothingness, like a sky-

Dust © 1990-91, photos, stainless steel, 122 x 122 cm

line on the screen, to imagine it cinematographically. “Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Gen. 2:7). The further prophecies on that account are not very promising: “Remember you are dust, to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19).

In the flat stainless steel cube of *Dust*, the photograph extends the illusion of the volume into the square package of tiny particles of matter, a strange composite of form and formlessness, preciseness and imprecision, finiteness and infinity. In its misty atmosphere, the half-hidden forehead beams with the red inscription, reminding us of the grim biblical promise. The human face acts as a catalyst in a kind of alchemical reaction, verbally fusing the existing present with the already ceased-to-exist past. No matter how important the dust of the past may seem, we can sweep its relevant remnants daily with no effects. What matters is that this very “us” is a central constituent of “dust,” and it solves and coagulates on its own. Similar to the multitude of its particles, we participate in this coagulation. However grave the appearance of impartiality worn by the eternal, it seems to “meet its beginning and end” through human consciousness, reconciling the eschatological meaning of “dust” with the potential beginning. Since there is life between birth and death, it’s reasonable to expect that there is also life between death and birth, but in a state of immersion, say, in such dust where our own faces are hidden from us.

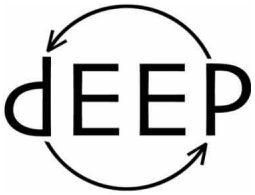


R. G., *Before Birth-After Death:* The cube can be opened from two sides; “Before birth” is written on the lid, “After death” appears on the bottom side, 8 cm ^{3}, 1974

The vitality of life, with its continuous flux of expansion and compression of energy, cannot be simply left behind unless it metamorphoses into another form, even one completely undetectable. Walt Whitman conceded himself a prime witness of such metamorphoses, proclaiming in his *Song of Myself* (49):

> "And as to you Life I reckon you are the leavings
> of many deaths,
> (No doubt I have died myself ten thousand times
> before.)"

If we superimpose the following phrases: "death feeds on life" and "life feeds on death," we can come to their vital deduction into – "life lives on life." All three sentences are equally sad, hopeful, and full of great adventure, not to mention that the merciless jungle of life-eats-life on the level of insects and further in the micro world is worse than a science-fictionist could ever have imagined. As opposed to the common Western lamentation over this self-absorbing process, the yogi's mind views it with certain relaxation by delivering the notion of death from mortal fears. "Whether I live or die, I am always," said Sri Aurobindo.[3]



Let us shift our focus from human thoughts on the life-and-death process to outer space, where the future is ever intrinsically linked to the past. Albert Einstein noted once that space looked suspicious to him because everything came out of it, and everything disappeared into it. With this in mind, we framed the image *Dust* within an illusory steel cube, an emblem of the material foundation. This disordered order is built upon the cosmic dust, which hides black holes, antiworlds, and other astronomical paradoxes. Its seemingly chaotic "blackout" is not a vacuum or a state of mere noth-

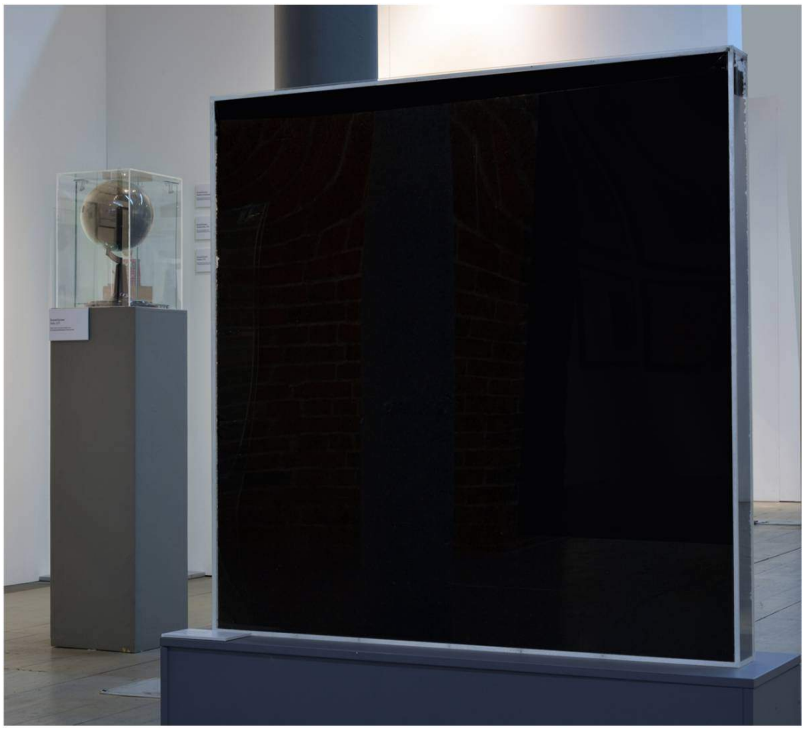
ingness but the very source and the essence of life disassembled to an unrecognizable condition. Think only how long it has taken the world, as it is now, to become what it is. Most of it became solid while the rest drifted off into the stardust of the great infinity. Its mess of particles is a living void, which, to the instinctive mind, looks like a nightmare of chaos reduced to the point of absence, worthlessness, and death – in one word: dust. But the dusty essence contains the potential-

R.G., *Before - After*, shown in closed and open positions: before birth and after death, 1988, wood, acrylic, 35 x 35 x 5 cm

ity of all life forms; it is empty yet produces all qualities. This condition in space has the potential of producing a force, which scientists call a field, a physical entity in its own right. The enduring supply of energy, alternating tension, and release maintain the existence and preserve the ashes of dust from the final diffusion. Out of the nothingness of dust, something may come, which can become everything in a final state. From an idealistic perspective, the germ of spirit fecundated the matrix of primeval chaos.

To summarize briefly, dust contains plenty of life, just like our earth. The earth element is traditionally symbolized by a cube, representing physical boundary, embodiment, and a euphemistic prison for the free spirit. This incubation within the earth element presupposes temporal and spatial limitations: temporal calls for transitory, spatial for fragmentary. Nevertheless, the cube remains a Platonic solid. As such, it is an emblem of order, permanence, and quaternary stability, like a carriage or a racecar, in the modern nomenclature, with the locked insider. That might seem like one bizarre statement after another. As an artist relying mainly on his intuition, not information, Valeriy made an object called *One Square Meter of Earth* back in Moscow in 1975. It was a Plexiglas construction precisely of the mentioned size, filled with undisturbed soil. It was nothing but earth, as typical as it

V. G., *One Square Meter of Earth*, 1975, soil, Plexiglas, 1 x 1 x 0.1 m. On the left: *The Globe*, soil, glass. Exhibition *Moscow Conceptualism. The Beginning* at Arsenal museum, Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, 2012

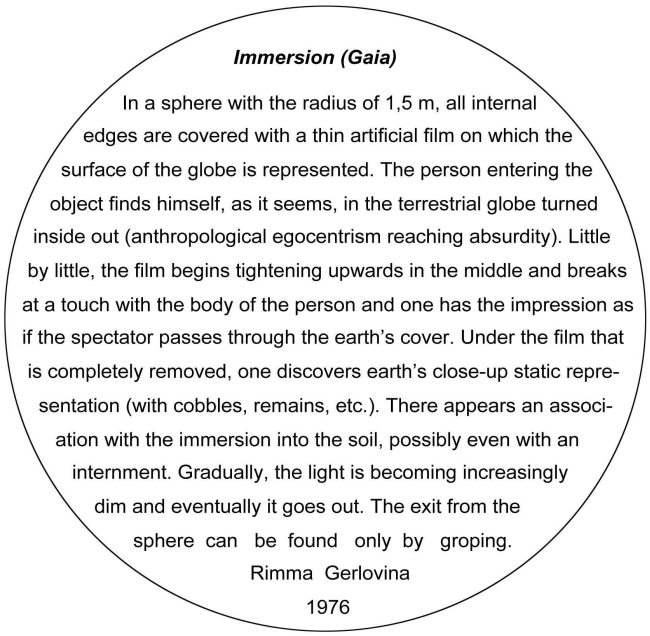


may be; in a way, it was a picture of itself. For a while, we watched the continuation of life, some soil organisms that continued to feed off the organic ground in this Plexiglas terrarium. Earth was represented in its pristine darkness and latency, linking gross matter-of-fact hyperrealism with the most abstract concept of matter.

> "And the earth was without form and void; and the darkness was upon the face of the deep" (Gen. 1:2).

Leaving Russia, we had to leave the contents of this work to the land to which it belongs, according to the customary law of the USSR. So we could take with us only an empty square meter. However, this work was recreated and filled with Russian soil for the exhibition *Moscow Conceptualism. The Beginning*, held in the Arsenal in Nizhny Novgorod in 2012.[4]

The idea of terra nostra as the foundation of life here and the basis for all undertakings in nature has a long history in our art. The earth embryo, relatively speaking, was projected in the installation presenting it as *Gaia* in a state of sucking



homogenous substance. Until we *understand* that we have sunk in the dust, we cannot emerge, being dispatched in the perpetual process of entering and leaving. The anticipatory death is initiatory. The boldness of the approach could cause an increased nervous excitability, overpowering the self with fear and longing. This, at first sight, a negative factor can also foster a strange, perhaps even great experience, as described by Rudolf Otto, a German philosopher and comparative religionist, in his book *The Idea of the Holy.*

> "There is a feeling of one's own submergence, of being but 'dust and ashes' and nothingness. And this forms the numinous raw material for the feeling of religious humility." [5]

Since the earth was a working material for Valeriy, one more of his conceptual objects has a definite relation to this later photographic incubation of dust. The glass sphere *Globe* filled with soil represented a familiar planet in our solar

V. G., *The Globe*, 1975, soil, glass, Plexiglas, metal, diam. 23 cm, stand 13 cm

system, thus fusing some elements of astronomy, geodesy, and readymade techniques with conceptual imagination.

With striking simplicity, Valeriy's burial-like object *Life of a Man in Two Parts* deals with the problem of "to be" and "not to be." Everyone born is bound to die, as we all know. In the hash expression in the Gospel of Philip, "This world is a corpse-eater" (73:20). Such an unpalatable memo can be expressed literally and figuratively, like in art. Considering this fact, Valeriy boxed two identical toy mannequins in vertical and horizontal positions, both over the ground and within it, and titled this diptych *Life of a Man in Two Parts (nota bene,* life in both cases). The closer we are to the state identified with the euphemism "the late one," the more we prefer to talk about it in abstract terms with a certain amount of idealism. At death, we would be something else, carried beyond molecular dissolution. Unaccustomed to non-existence, our nature craves life again by falling back into piecemeal molecular matter or wandering in some other dimension. After death, we are in the world of consciousness without timing. When earthly life ceases to exist, how does

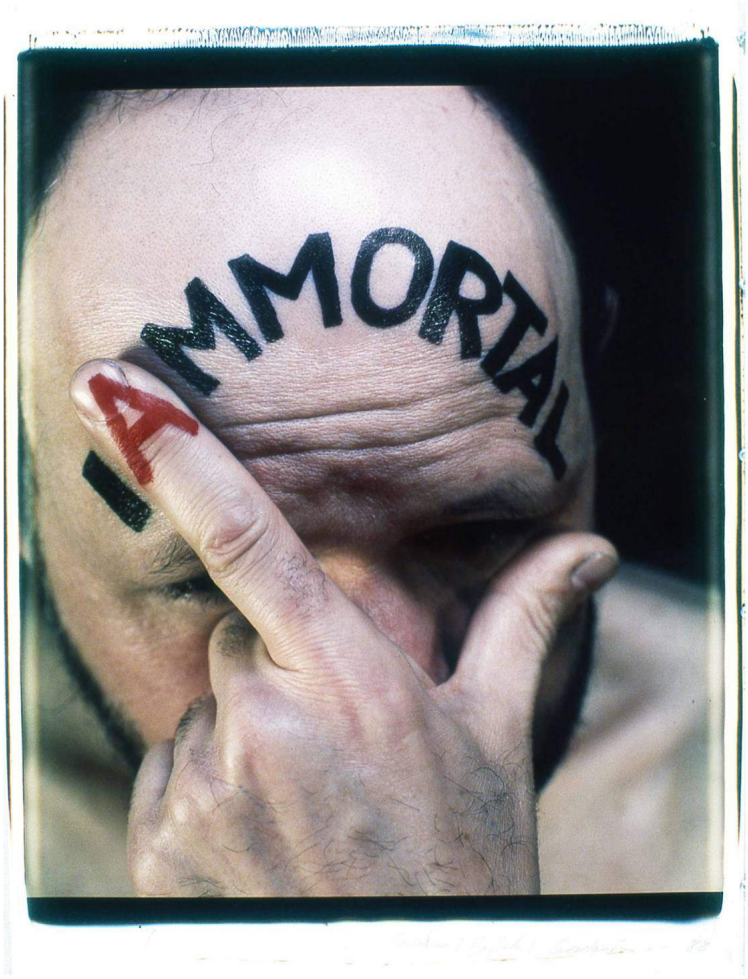
V. G., *Life of a Man in Two Parts,* 1976, soil, toy manikins, mazonite, glass, enamel, 46 x 88 x 11 cm

one deal with eternity? From our side, we stay within the frame of our artwork, talking in symbols, even if they are of a lethal nature, or more accurately, representing a deadly crisis in spiritually alive conditions with some "regression into the hiddenness." However, there is always hope that when the eternal rest reserved for dust or, rather, an unidentifiable process *in absentia* reaches its "maturity," similar to the consolidation of germs of life in the invisible womb, it may lead naturally to potential birth.

To expand this somewhat "polymerous" notion of death, let us turn to Chinese tradition, in which both death and birth happen at a place called "north earth" or the "treasure house of dreams," indicated by Northeast Mountain in the *Book of Changes*, also known as the *I Ching*. The event of the revivification takes place in the winter, the moment of decay and preparation for the following spring. (It sounds almost like Christmas time or winter equinox.) The new form has to be reconstituted to ease the heavy load and accumulation of physical and psychic content of the past, calling for changes in the old, exhausted environment. When a bodily vacuum cleaner becomes full of dust, it needs reloading and recycling. According to the enlightening transcription of Chinese wisdom by Richard Wilhelm, such reloading happens to be in a deep sleep and total disassociation with the past, allowing for the absorption of revitalizing cosmic forces. For the ancient Chinese, it was a compulsory "rest in the terrestrial realm" for "return of vitality through heavenly aspect."

> "The extinction of yesterday is necessary for the preparation for tomorrow - after all, we do not only live in one time, but we live, as it were, in an onion of different time shells." [6]

Indeed, the disintegration in physical form may be difficult to accept since all living creatures by nature are attracted to life and instinctively fear the void. For the life of one humble creature, his own death is equal to a disaster of cosmic proportion. This theme related to *memento mori* (remember to die, Lat.) is verily immortal for humanity. We are all obliged to keep our "mementomoriship" always active and ready to "use" it when requested. The key aspect of ancient Egyptian theology lay in its teaching on death and how to be equipped



Gerlovina, Berghash, Gerlovin,
I'mmortal © 1988, Polaroid,
70 x 51 cm

for it. And Socrates in *Phaedo* maintained that the whole study of the philosopher is nothing but to die and be dead. Besides, many transitive stages before the final destination might be interpreted on a psychological level. Death on the low plane of consciousness might be and often is synchronized with the birth on the higher plane; that is, the old self must die to reappear on a new level of vision and understanding. Perhaps man is mortal as a body and immortal as a spirit, as was to be shown in the image *I'mmortal.*

Following the above precepts, we developed them based on speculative background. Other thoughts about the incubation of ashes and *Dust* in the flat cube can be reduced to

several simple thoughts: death is a regression into the invisible; dust is also cosmic dust, and cosmos in Greek means "order." The idea raised in *Dust* has provoked many respectable minds in the history of mankind. Reflecting on this, we wrote a short polylogue created from the fruits of their thinking.

UNLI'MITED

(A play for polyphonic voices for dramatic personae; no limit to their numbers.)

Hamlet. (Moody) To be or not to be: that is the question.
Whitman. (Confidently) Has anyone supposed it lucky to be born? I hasten to inform him or her that it is just as lucky to die, and I know it.
Socrates. (Aside) The business of a philosopher is a continuous exercise in dying.
Eckhart. (Irresistibly) I was born to and for eternity, and because of my eternal birth, I shall never die.
Blake. (Pressing) I cannot think of death as more than going out of one room into another.
Voice from Amphitheater. (Mocking) A mosquito that dies daily goes through the spinning door between these rooms incessantly, isn't it so?
Mosquito. (Full of vital fluids) Bloody fools! I am what I am!
St. Paul. (In a conciliatory way) I die daily.
Kierkegaard. (Sick unto death) For when I am dead, I am immortal.
Sri Aurobindo. (Thoughtfully) When I live or die, I am always.
Heidegger. (Clutching his garters with self-confidence) Why is being altogether being and not nothing?
A seven-year-old. (Puzzled) Death is like walking into your mind.
The Buddha. (Refuses to speak on the ground that affirmation or negation equally raises misunderstanding.)

(The voices continue to grow and multiply, interfering with each other. Abrupt sentences in different languages are heard from a distance)
Raison d'être...

Who will deliver me from the body of this death? ...
Mors certa, hora incerta...
Does not an infant die to become a child? ...
$E=mc^2$...
La vita es sueño...
Death is merely a translation back to the soul's element...
Ding an Sich...
Отдать концы в бесконечность...
memento...
more...

No end

Profile © 1989/94, photo,
metal, cut-out window

The concepts of void and infinity cannot be embodied but can be introduced metaphorically. In the *Flat Solid*, under the title *Void*, the "voidness" of that very word turns into a mental make-up for the ontological realm of a non-local expanse of the psyche. In simple words, space, time, and void are concepts that exist in the mind capable of exploring them theoretically. However, this work refers not only to the psychological space but also to the sphere which lies beyond the physical one. The human mind is conditioned to function in a three-dimensional world, and it cannot conceive that further dimensions exist beyond it, has no way of reaching a state of being entirely outside itself, and still less can imagine its own

Void © 1989/94, photo, stainless steel, aluminum, pencil shading, 122 x 106 cm

fathomless sinking into fathomless nothingness. Life without living is incomprehensible because it is nothing. Emptiness serves emptiness: neither height nor depth, nor forward or backward. Reaching the polar circle of the mind, it's Arctic with an icy abyss for the psyche; it sinks into unknown and unnamed, turning into unbeing. Nature in no way contributes

Beyond © 1992, photo, metal

to this, unwilling to release us from the matrix of the world. And there is something more, for nature does not tolerate a vacuum and no-thing-ness; it needs thing-ness. Nothing may endure in ever-renewing nature, for which the void is worse than a twilight state of uncertainty.

We wonder whether we could look at the void and its infinite nothingness from a detached perspective. Does non-existence exist? Can a man be mystically open to the concept

of nothingness or remain lost in its inexhaustible spring of infinity? Nothingness is never-ending in its sameness: no parameters, no form of finite this- and that-ness. What if even nothingness does not exist? Philosophically, zero-dimensionality presupposes non-existence of space and time, object and subject, self and other, unity and diversity, affirmation and negation, beginning and ending, etc. Nothing is deeper than anything. Certain words create a certain kind of silence as if we try to define zero-dimensionality of the void. It's a zero-point field that contains the least irremovable energy. Sinking deeper into the well of our artistic deceptions, we might cheer the Zen concept of the double negation based on neither/nor probability that surpasses the relative notion of "nothing," turning it into "absolute nothingness" or "void of voidness."

The mind easily gets entangled in the intricacies of the futile wandering in the void. If we resort to the brain's ability to grasp the concept of zero (null), we may obtain an adequate version of how nothing relates to everything. Zero is "something," which is also "nothing," neither existing nor not existing, neither "whole" nor "hole." Emptiness and its

R. G., *W-hole:* The circle with black "hole" can be rotated, 1988, plywood, acrylic, 44.5 x 44.5 x 7 cm

The Egg © 1992-4, photo, metal,
pencil hatching, 107 x 81 cm

mathematical expression, zero, can be observed via its antitheses, abiding by the proposition of the meeting of extremes. Take zero as nothing, but if you add it to 1, you get 10; add more "nothings" to 10, you get millions, etc. In our artwork, the mysterious zero often assumes the form of an egg, conveying its potential in an organic way. Such is the relief *Egg*, whose geometric horizontal section is "three-dimensionally flat," while another real egg in a nest of hair suggests a potential paradigm for other similar eggs multiplying *ad infinitum.*

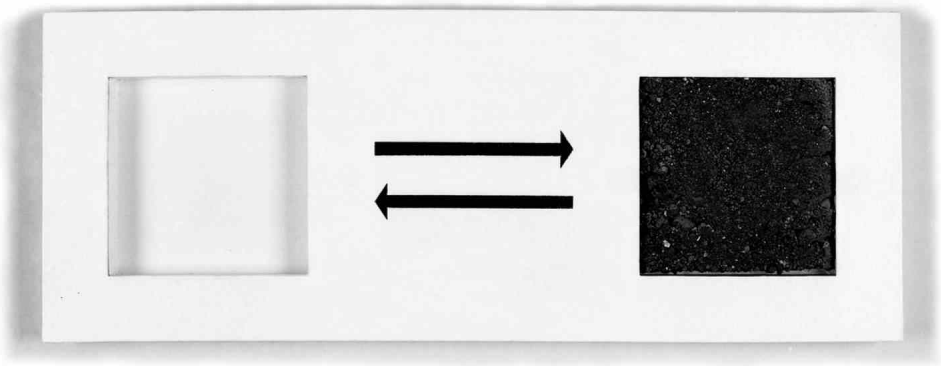
The negation of negation is equal to an affirmation, for two negatives cancel each other (-1 x -1 = +1). Another rule

in our mental toolbox is that if zero is multiplied by any other number, the result is zero. Converting this mathematical definition into vernacular, we find that "nothingness" swallows all things. This observation can be turned in the opposite direction, as in the theological doctrine: from nothing, everything *(ex nihilo omnia,* Lat.), which naturally contradicts Parmenides' concept that nothing comes from nothing *(ex nihilo nihil fit,* Lat.), meaning that creation cannot come from nothingness. We could leave it at that, hoping other noteworthy opinions would resolve the contradiction.

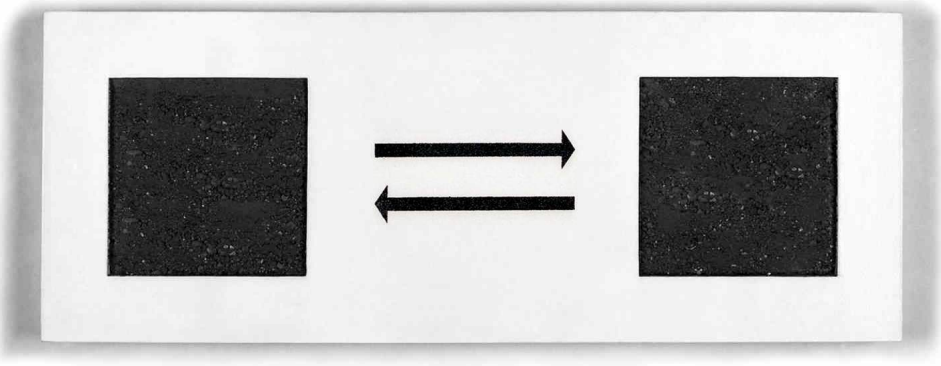
The void might be the hidden oneness of everything, the supreme repository of force. The concept of the Buddhist *sunyata* offers a similar explanation: emptiness holds the maximum potential in its vacuum. Exhausting all views, *sunyata* is not itself another view. Goethe contributed to this idea by expressing it poetically. To Mephistopheles' question: "Can you imagine Nothing everywhere?" Faust answers: "In this your Naught I hope to find my all" (6255). Void contains an invisible medium of life in its creative emptiness, perhaps not only in the mystical sense. With its mysterious effect of emptiness, this creative nonexistence hides the new dawning. The scientific explanation of the void, as a plenum in a vacuum, was vividly suggested by Charles Muses:

> "There can be some things which are physically effective which are not physical... [as] the zero-point energy of the vacuum. The vacuum is defined in quantum physics as space devoid of radiation or matter – no energy, no matter. Yet there is an inherent energy in there, which can be measured – this is one of the great triumphs of modern physics – and that is physically effective. Yet, it obviously is not a pure vacuum. The so-called savage would say to us, 'The room is empty, and the wind is a magic spirit.' We know it is air. So, we are like the savage in saying that the vacuum is empty. There is something there." [7]

Applying this observation to the thought process, which can be extended, we dare to assume the existence of quanta of mental energy in the void, thus creating an extraneous relationship from matter. As it was known in mysticism,



V. G., *Emptiness - Earth* and *Earth - Earth*, 1975, soil, mazonite, glass, enamel, each work 25 x 65 x 4 cm



numinous experience tends to come in silence and void, free of dramatic opposition between fullness and emptiness, time and timelessness, existence and nonexistence. The mystical phenomena of complete detachment and loss of personal identity were based on very elaborate practices, such as deep introversion requiring emptying the mind of its swarm of images and thoughts. Absorbed by the idea of absolute nullity of this life, mystics were supposed to experience total self-loss in the Divine abyss – *abyss abyssum invocat* (deep calls into deep). This experience was not an occasional lostness,

darkness of Tartarus, or limbo of forgetfulness. One can dwell on nothing all the time, but the mind tends to return to its usual state, trapped again in the net of clinging to inter-changing thoughts. Temporary escapes happen in mystical practices. An ongoing effort is required for self-training to think less and less until one thinks of nothing at all. The last thought of "I," "me," and "mine" must disappear, varnish into thin air. Reaching such a point where there is nothing to be emptied, the mind fills itself with the void, the notion of which is unthinkable for the thinking mind. Then the void will cease to be a void; pure faith opens to zero-point in infinity, the point where thoughts stop in a mystical under-

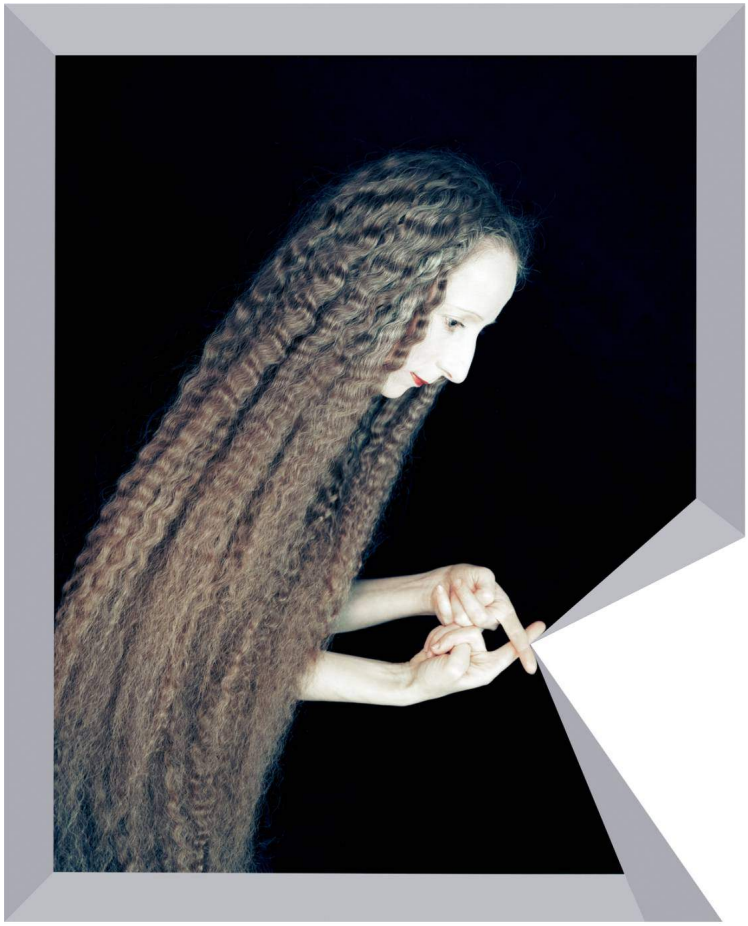
Serpent between © 1998,
photo, metal, empty space

standing of God or, in other words, nearing the single opening to the higher dimension. Dionysius the Areopagite had defined God as "pure nothing," which idea was further elaborated by Eriugena:

> "*Creatio ex nihilo* fundamentally means creation from the *nihil* that is God; it is nothing else than the affirmation of the divine negation *(negati affirmatio)* by means of which God reveals "Himself' both to himself and to what He makes." [8]

In Christian mysticism, only by voiding oneself of all that is

Finger Cross © 1998,
photo, metal



not God can one come to God. The metaphysical vacuum, empty of everything, seems to underlie the theological explanation of the emptiness of the tomb of Christ.

In Indian mystical tradition, liberated souls can catapult from one universe to another, for they are part of *maya,* dreams that one shares with God. According to the Hindu *shastras* (scriptures, Skr.), the ultimate goal is *moksha,* a final release from *samsara* (cycles of rebirths), while for Buddhists, *moksha* is only a gateway to a final goal, which is nirvana (emptiness of any characteristics), possible after true *sunyata* (void) is realized. The Tantric doctrine sounds more radical in that matter: everything is illusory *(maya);* only the universal void *(sunya)* is real; everything else has no ontological reality. When there is nothing to which the mind can cling to, it comes into forgetting and not-knowing in stillness and silence, sinking into nothingness where logic and reason have no place. The sense of the world is gone if the mind is moved out of the ego matrix into something undefinable. Moreover, when consciousness has nothing that makes it conscious, it enters the void or pure non-being equated to beingness in measureless depth. Coming to this, one would finish this discourse by saying that all is relative, and all grasping efforts for void are futile, for there is nothing to be grasped. However, as visual artists, we still need the visuals even if they are veiling nothing but nothingness.

Emptiness as an artistic device is invisible, intangible, and only recognizable in its effects. Extension into regions beyond visibility is not a deceit but the product of a free imagination that has not yet entered actuality, just symptoms of intuition, half-real, half-solid, half-empty, half-void. Thus, the reliefs with cut-out empty spaces "embody" nothingness unencumbered by the matter. It would rather be correct to say that these *Flat Solids* are on the border between the world and whatever is outside the world, looking empty, where none of the ordinary rules seem to be applied. In raising the mind to the imagined void, we direct every part of our mental wake-up to that sphere that lies beyond the material scope where our everyday, physical perceptions are useless, absolute nullity of them. Left in a condition of "free-floating in emptiness," the mind also displays its weightless side of thinking, weaved of finer stuff.

Intangible elements thus removed from photographs

Slit © 1998/2009, photo in stainless steel construction, 122 x 99 cm

and metal frames were designated by various contours. Speaking allegorically, they depicted the "ventilation aperture" between time and space in the "steel" framework of physical reality. For example, in the work *Slit,* the light is focused on a window drawn on the palm. It is present invisibly, created through literal physical emptiness and airy transparency wedged into the stainless steel relief. The light with which we see is invisible. We only see what it illuminates. In the world of the tangible, it is difficult to find an adequate expression for depicting intangibility. In the series *Cutouts*, the body is shown *in absentia*, i.e., through its absence, thus

gaining its complete weightlessness.

Let us look at how emptiness performs its "feats of art" in the hollow relief *Pregnant,* "expecting" a tentative body out of subtle matter or no matter at all, from thought and by thought. That partly incorporeal work seems to code a kind of pre-existent body, an invisible image of the invisible child, and yet the image is pregnant. Evidently, here, we have two mutually exclusive properties existing simultaneously, which can strike one as an impenetrable riddle, defying all logic and theory. We would like, in passing, to note that such foci are never a problem in art, for they also have within themselves qualities that can stimulate psychic faculty and imagination.

Pregnant © 1995, photo, metal, pen drawing on Plexiglas

Expecting a child invisible and incorporeal – *reductio ad absurdum* (Lat.) - can be interpreted in a pure mystical sense, suggesting that the soul asserts its presence by filling all the emptiness with a mysterious existence *in potentia.* The probability of pregnancy that merely has the capability of becoming probable (please pardon the reiteration) carries an eerie uncertainty with a stark duality of meaning.

Let us draw a mathematical parallel: a paradoxical idea of non-well-founded sets, i.e., sets that contain themselves as members, is a kind of hypothetical conundrum for many experts; besides, it does sound like a logical impossibility of the expression "a baby of a barren woman." As if following the absurdity of non-well-founded sets, the hollow reliefs *Pregnant* and *Deliverance* contain a world from which everything is absent, everything except the self. The scientific hypothesis that the spaceless void contains more energy than all the matter provokes a kind of antithesis in our minds –

Deliverance © 1993, photo, metal, pencil shading

what if the spirit, being the most perfect, occupies the least possible space? According to Meister Eckhart, mystics prayed that they may eternally sink from nothingness to nothingness in God.[9] Taoists developed the formula for the release from the matrix and return to emptiness:

> Refine vitality into energy.
> Refine energy into spirit.
> Refine spirit into emptiness.[10]

Comparing ideas from various sources, one can end up with a fairly objective picture, for any topic can change its meaning depending on the position with which we approach it, whether in a scientific, metaphysical, or artistic sense.

People always search for equilibrium in our ecosystem. Since everything is related to everything else, the essence of this commendable initiative can be boiled down to the counterbalance of the meaning of birth and death, both in actuality and potentiality. By correlating the "anatomy" of the image *Pregnant* with the "substructure" of the relief *Springtime (Osiris),* we get something similar. Take the most dramatic example: all people celebrate the birth of a child – the arrival of a new soul in this life, while the enlightened Greeks, mystics, yogis, Buddhists, and various doubting philosophers saw it in a different light. When asked by King Midas, "What is the best human destiny?" the seer Silenus answered:

> "Oh, wretched ephemeral race, children of chance and misery, why do you compel me to tell you what it would be most expedient for you not to hear? What is best of all is utterly beyond your reach: it is not born at all, and the most successful fate following it is to die as soon as possible." [11]

Compared with the disagreement on such radical issues as life and death – the soul is in league with both sides– the divergence in interpreting our works is not an anomaly. The coffin in *Springtime* is freed from the weight of the earth not obeying its laws. The green shoots lack the firm ground and sprout themselves on the feet. The coffin is not sealed; its emptiness enters the space around it, opening to the boundless and incomprehensible. It is not a pitiable vacuum gaping

Springtime (Osiris) © 1998,
photos, metal

"under one's feet" but rather an extension into a realm above the perceptible world.

We would take our intuition no further if there were no other weird things. The simple open casket would have to display a body, but it is "lost" in that which has no definition. The feet are sticking out of the casket, but where is the body they belong to? Everywhere, nowhere, somewhere? When death triggers the breakthrough between worlds, the mind can sink into the void as if it is a stranger to the body. Who has ever plumbed the depth of nothingness, diving ahead in undiminishing eternity? The very human meditations on this tantalizing question are written in the very fabric of Thomas

Mann's novels *The Magic Mountain* and *Buddenbrooks:*

> "What would end, what would dissolve? His body, his personality, his contemptible barrier to becoming something different and better." [12]

However, the image *Springtime (Osiris)* is a kind of metaphor for a double vision, allowing birth to exist on the reverse side of death as if taking the little green steps beyond all the insecurity of the grave. Any statement can be reduced to absurdity by exaggerated arguments, hence the antithetical structure of our thinking. Mind is not brain; consciousness can exist without the physical body, and the void is a continuum in infinity. Against such a background, the casket that appears from the utopian nowhere may not strike one as strange, considering that the word "utopian" is derived from the Greek for "nowhere." The self-emptying process can be described in old gnostic terms: letting oneself fall from the coffin into life through the self-regenerating power of *Pleroma* ("plentitude," Grk.). Death is only a transformation, for life neither begins nor ends.

Some details of this *Flat Solid* are worth noting: the elfin figure with a coat of silky frizzy hair is a prime witness of the funerary *Springtime.* Wrapped in hair, almost like a mummy, she is either a mourner or midwife, perhaps both in one person. The overall picture evokes different associations, and one of them is the famed *Enigma of Bologna,* discovered on a Roman tombstone near Bologna in the sixteenth century. Because of its paradoxical arcanum, we reprint it in its entirety.

> "Aelia Laelia Crispis,
> Neither man nor woman, nor mongrel, nor maid, nor boy, nor crone, nor chaste, nor whore, nor virtuous, but all.
> Carried away neither by hunger, nor by sword, nor by poison, but by all.
> Neither in heaven, nor in earth, nor in water, but everywhere is her resting place.

Bodyless © 1996, drawing on glass, the transparent silhouette is cut out from the photograph

Lucius Agatho Priscius,
Neither husband, nor lover, nor kinsman, neither mourning, nor rejoicing, nor weeping, [raised up] neither mound, nor pyramid, nor tomb, but all.
He knows and knows not [what] he raised up to whom.
This is a tomb that has no body in it.
This is a body that has no tomb round it.
But body and tomb are the same." [13]

(Full text in original Latin [14])

In alchemical argot, the tomb often symbolizes the womb, death and rebirth in one vessel, a container for the process of transformation. The self-transforming, self-devouring, self-generating individual, mortal as a body and immortal as a soul, resurrects in an alchemical coffin. During that operation that "fixes the volatile and volatilizes the fixed," spirit is refined to emptiness in a meditative sense. Some interpreters suggested that the name Aelia Laelia is derived from Latin words for sun and moon, while Crispis comes from *crispus* (curly-haired). The encryption of this puzzle hides something that might exist or might not, known deep down in the subconscious that accumulates all possible contradictions, or completely unknown and unknowable. Perhaps this inscription did not appear without the influence of the much older Gnostic Apocryphon *The Thunder, Perfect Mind,* written in Greek before A.D. 350. Delivered by an androgynous female as a riddling monologue, it has the same paradoxical antithetical character so conspicuous as to be even nowadays a topic of poetic work linking devotional prayers with the absurdity of existence.

"I am the whore and the holy one,
I am the wife and the virgin.
I am the mother and the daughter.
I am the member of my mother.
I am the barren one." [15]

Sprout © 1994, photos, metal

Synergy © 1996, photos, metal, cut out

Working on the next bit of the *Enigma of Bologna,* we see that it also includes the male character Lucius Agatho Priscius, thus dealing with two genders: anima and animus, eros and logos, mercury and sulfur, the female and male aspects of the soul. In that case, the tomb can be interpreted not only as a womb but also as a bridal chamber, where the opposites unite in their *hieros gamos* ("sacred marriage," Grk.). More specifically, they are the androgynous female and the androgynous male joined in the mysterious unity. The primordial androgynes reintegrate into one suprapersonal psyche, meaning that behind the two dwells one, and each is both, making one mind. The same idea is elaborated in the mentioned Apocryphon:

> "I am the bride and the bridegroom
> and it is my husband who begot me." [15]

The infinite self conceives within itself the duality of oneself and the other within paradoxical emptiness, where there's neither "I" nor another. Following the doctrine of self-naughting, which deals with nothing, the mystical aspect of this duality, its immateriality and immortality *(athanatos*, literally "non-death," Grk.), is maintained by invisible and incorporeal *pneuma* ("breath," "spirit," "soul," Grk.) as it is held in the old script:

"I am the substance and the one who has no substance
I am the union and the dissolution
I am the abiding and I am the dissolving.

Double © 1996, photos, metal

I am the one whom they call life,
and you have called death.” [15]

On the fingertip © 1995,
photo, metal, cutout

Returning to the *Enigma of Bologna* we must add that it has obsessed many inquirers for over four hundred years; lots of thick books were written on this topic. Without boundaries for the diversity of ideas, fantasies, and delusions, many authors tried to discover its meaning, which might (or might not) be lost, or whether it ever existed. However, the empty shell of its mystery remains, perhaps, far more potent than people of average caution and consideration would think.

Pianist © 1998, photos, metal

The image *Pianist* is also strange and improbable enough: ghost piano, ghost hands; the emptiness wedges into the image with an acute angle. In simple words, a prominent part of the photograph is literally non-existent – we cut it out. Some spectral fingers seem to be moving over the alleged keyboard; they are painted as if they are keys producing notes. An invisible piano player and an empty instrument are one another. There is no piano per se, only an open cutout of emptiness from which the imaginary sounds come. Music cannot be seen; we see only by whom and by what it is made with, but its effect is pleasing and stimulating. It seems rather worthless to analyze its claims upon human emotions. The

massless purity of music allows it to pass through our beings – listen, and something unusual might take place in you. Photographs can depict the atmosphere of music only silently, so it is in the image *Pianist*, suggesting an extraordinary telepathic connection between the musician and the instrument. The silent music guides the movements of the hands dancing in the empty darkness. Inaudible sounds are of such a different kind of sonority that they seem to originate in the void as a sheer hallucination. Music is all in our minds. Exhibiting a certain ominous similarity to the hands of nowhere, the figure of the mesmerized listener is slight and slim to the point of delicacy, almost like a spirit at séances. Trying to enter the listener's state, one might perceive the silent sounds at a

Waves © 1990

higher frequency, making the bridge between the pictorial and sonorous perception of the mystical content. What if you try to play "empty-handed," only as an intention in unison with the soundless music, as if someone other than yourself is playing in your place, some outsider with levitating hands? The silence of such music is almost palpable.

Bread Cross is one more picture with blank emptiness – the ghost of a table over which the bread cross stands as if hanging in space. The thingness of the table is lacking. As to the prerequisite conditioning, the emptiness is an immanent part of the work, as if some mysterious force had "vacuumed" through the table, leaving only its silhouette. If all strange things are to be brought into proportion of some sort, we have to reorient our attention to the figure supervising the table, for it exhibits a wonderful thinness as if all its bones have been extracted. The hostess has no hands or feet but sees and feels everything, focusing on the eerie cross of bread standing conspicuously on the rim of an imaginable table. Fans of mythology might see in it a picture of a magical table on which the

Bread Cross © 1988, photo, metal

bread is set at all times. Perhaps for others, it vaguely evokes the prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11). This food is given to the hungry, both physically and spiritually. Rendering an intangible substance with a tangible means, we made a cross from two loaves to symbolize balanced opposites, sacrifice, a bridge between time and eternity, and many other hidden aspects that may fascinate enquiring minds. John Donne wrote in *The Cross:*

> "Look down, thou spiest out crosses in small things;
> look up, thou seest birds raised on crossed wings."

The dual nature attributed to bread and wine is body and spirit; hence, the bread cross is a carnal symbol with a subliminal meaning: physical nature is a continual cross for the spirit. Indeed, "man lives not by bread alone," as Moses responded to the suggestion to turn stones into loaves. The cross with a sacrificial status is strangely related to everyday bread because challenges and obstacles are ingrained in man's destiny in daily life. It happens not only with a few people of the better kind, excepting them as a preliminary condition of initiation into the spiritual consciousness, but also to the most strong and powerful who cannot imagine the world without themselves. In a complex mix of pride and humility, the most flexible of us can transfer failure and difficulties in life. Still, by and large, all the challenges to the ego (in severe cases, its crucifixion) are a daily ordeal in the material world. A more accurate meaning of that transpires in the words of the German mystic Johannes Tauler:

> "If we looked into our hearts, we would find The Cross there twenty times a day in many painful incidents and afflictions by which we are indeed crucified if only we understood the sign." [16]

To give this idea an allegoric form, we "baked" our daily *Bread Cross* in an unexpected twist, i.e., from the perspective of metaphoric art. This feature can be complimentary and in equilibrium with some apocryphal ideas and esoteric models; however, it is not for us to set verbal limits to such phenomena. In certain moments, the language loses all meaning and returns to the inarticulate.

3: CATERPILLAR - BUTTERFLY

The main feature of the *Unfolding Series* is that all of its reliefs seem to spread out from a folded state, depicting a process in which something passes by degrees to a different, perhaps more advanced or mature stage. The photographs of various parts of the human figure were inserted into flat metal compositions, creating the illusion of bending, sitting, spiraling, jumping, or gradually unfolding into something "other," just as a caterpillar unfolds into a butterfly.

Have you ever imagined how the butterfly emerges from its pupa? Not knowing how to fly, it relies on the impetus of its wings. Let us look at the scenario of its entomological development representing the stages of the archetypal regenerative process per se. After going through its larval stage, a crawling, "one-dimensional" caterpillar spins its own tomb, the cocoon. Using certain glands producing the lepidopteran metamorphic hormone, the caterpillar converts its cocoon into a pupa, the inner shell or chrysalis, exhibiting the outline of the future wings on its case. There, a caterpillar sheds its skin, twisting and squirming within its opaque capsule; all its organs gradually dissolve, metamorphosing into another form, the winged imago or simply a butterfly that emerges after the pupal skin bursts. Once out, the butterfly hangs from the cocoon for a few hours, drying its wet wings before it is able to fly. To verify this, it would be sufficient to order a caterpillar and butterfly kit online and watch the whole holometamorphosis, as it is called in entomology.

I'MAGO

This process is a crude, imperfect analogy to the principle of human evolution. Similar to the caterpillar, man has a kind of regenerative gland within the area of the hypothalamus. Unsophisticated in entomology and anthropogenesis, we project this as a model, interpreting the whole process in an artistic psycho-mythological manner, yet considering that paradoxical nature might violate the fundamental laws of logic. Individuality is born based on the dissolving personality of a so-called natural man. Recalling the burial of a

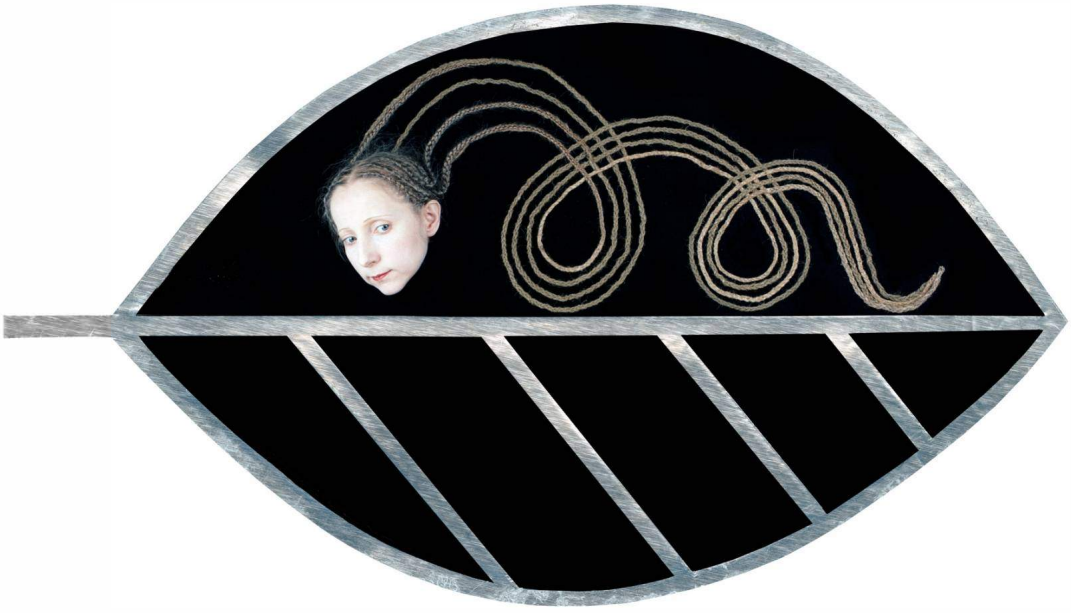
Caterpillar - Butterfly © 1993,
photos, metal

silkworm in its cocoon, evolving through the three transformative conditions: a human being follows a similar process, speaking allegorically, living in its larval, metamorphic, and imago state. After prolonged larval existence, decomposition comes first, followed by reintegration and regeneration. All symptoms occur rather gratuitously, assisting in the victory of man's spiritual nature over his animality. Then, the cause of one's life is profoundly changed. "Myself, the same as before, yet unaccountably new," wrote D.H. Lawrence *(New Heaven and Earth)*. These phases are but metaphors for another and more secret operation within the human being.

Every psychological plane that one reaches will be equivalent to an existential situation. As coarse and uncomfortable as it sounds, the larval stage is an ordinary human condition

with a tenacious attachment to all kinds of natural habits. In the flux of everyday occurrences, most people behave alike, with similar thoughts, intentions, and deeds. This does not prevent them from looking good, exhibiting excellent social skills, and, on the off chance, not entirely trusting their fellow men. Living a life of circumscribed behavior, lacking initiative or abundant in it, some have more than one deal with conscience without regard for decency. One more type of character is fairly common: a polite man who looks like someone with a nice library, contributing to his winning charm and polished tact in conversation. Owning many profitable deals to his self-assurance and elegance, he hardly touches on abstruse esoteric subject matter that reasonable people do not think about and do not even want to know about. Some individuals are content with themselves and the world, while others are discontent, which makes no difference. In short, for all their diversity, people in this stage are fine, orderly citizens, children of their century without solid moral foundations, and materialists at heart, despite their possible outward interest in spiritual needs. Nevertheless, potential changes in the cognitive and personal spheres may

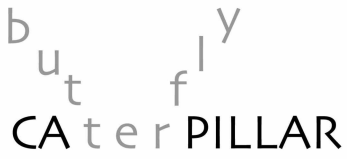
Leaf © 1993, photo, metal



concern everyone sooner or later. Meister Eckhart, who coined the term "an eternal birth," considered human transformation into beings of higher evolution to be the heritage of mankind as a whole:

> "Every creature is on its way to the highest perfection. In each, there is movement from mortality toward being." [17]

To sum things up on the objective level, an inevitable fate simply takes its course for better or worse when the curse of perpetuation in material life acts under the pressure of the implacable necessity of natural law. In the end, things in life turn out to be appropriate because all beings necessarily live in circumstances that are suitable for their level of development, whether they agree or disagree with them. To alter these conditions, people must first alter themselves.



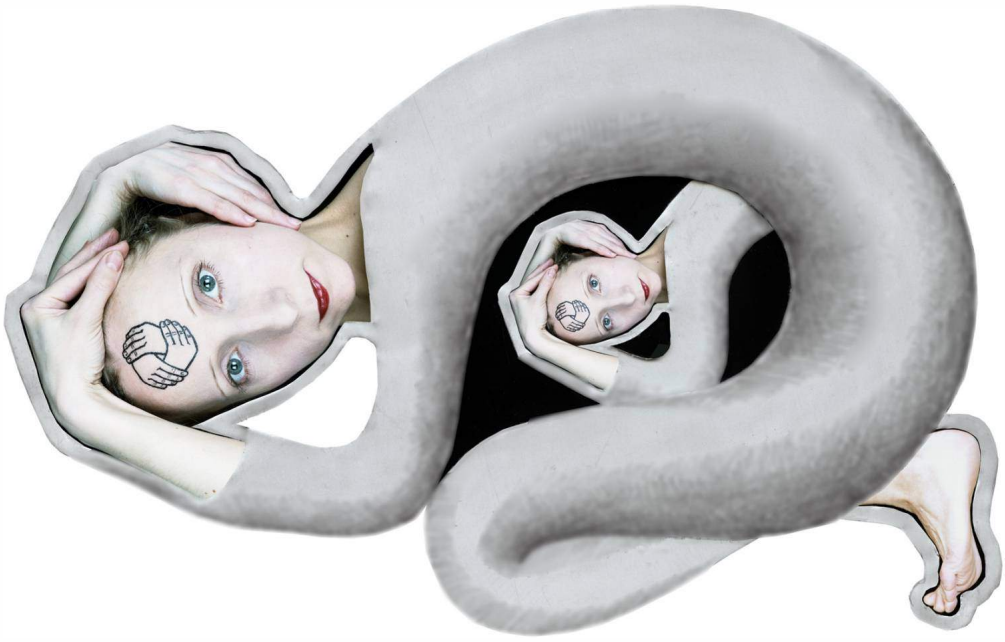
The transitional process in a human organism is evoked by energy from beyond, for it is not a self-willed enterprise. This metaphoric anthropogenesis is based on a psychoactive effect that helps rise above a materialistic understanding of life – a passage from a state of nature to a state of grace. The germ of another entity with another life can spring from the disintegrated material of man's old nature. The timing of the stimulation depends on personal karma and interactions with natural frequencies. Prenatal existence or the beginning of a new "creation" is not accidental; everything is somehow foreseen and provided for a higher, transcendent "pregnancy" that one must await its term. Figuratively speaking, one is reborn of predestination. The influx of uplifting and transforming energy opens a rusty neural valve in the brain near the hypothalamus (incidentally, "thalamus" means bridal chamber in Greek). One is born not outwardly but inwardly, for this second birth is not biological but spiritual; it takes

place in the consciousness, not in the flesh. An expert in this area, G.R.S. Mead offered a rather intelligible description of this kind of super biology:

> "The physical birth was the birth or genesis into matter, the other the essential birth or *palingenesis* [rebirth], the means of re-becoming a purely spiritual being." [18]

Once more, to utline, the new birth is not a repetition of natural birth in the profane world but a new mode of being corresponding to the sacred world, inaccessible to the natural way of living. In folk annals and various religious tenets, this metamorphosis is equated with changing the caterpillar into the pupa that, in turn, mysteriously transforms into the butterfly. By analogy, its natural phases and symptoms can serve as the appropriate symbols in the transitional process of human mutation from a brutal being into *homo sapiens* and, if possible, into *homo spiritus.* Each new phase seeks a fresh garment for the ideas animating human consciousness, trying

Perpetuum © 1995, photos, metal, pencil hatching



as ever to keep our minds from being dominated by sensual desires. Of whatever range and type they might be, sensual desires are from the caterpillar's universe.

The regenerative process was interpreted in different cultures in various ways, but similar general traits are still present. The first that comes to mind is Ancient Egypt, where the evocative command for the beginning of changes belonged to the star power Sirius-Isis, which prepared fixed "larval" souls for the evolutionary changes. According to the symbols of this ancient culture, the transitional process involved a mystical emulation of the newborn winged god Horus with the falcon head. Embalming and mummification were referred to as the metamorphic process and preparation for the regeneration. Briefly recall that the pupal form is deprived of almost all exterior mobility and no food until it discards its caterpillar's skin. Then, the pupa, in which all the caterpillar's organs are transformed, appears with wings, and the imago receives the ability to fly. The Osirian chamber of transformation is similar to the chrysalis state; it was an em-

Between the Fingers © 1995,
photos, metal, pencil hatching

balming place where the body was swathed and encased as a mummy, from which the seed or embryo of Horus was to develop. Like in a pupal shell, the higher body was concealed within the bio-molecular body. The initiate was prepared for

Sun Disc © 1998

the next mutation in this pupal shell, or the enswathed mummy in its case (the chrysalis of the future butterfly). Some secret juvenile hormones triggered higher evolutionary advances in the human brain, gradually introducing a new force assigned to Horus in falcon form or imago state. Picto-

rial gradations of the three stages were described in many ancient papyri and carved on the walls. An explanation by Charles Muses:

> "The completed circle of 360 degrees... corresponds to the three types of couch or bier on which the inert Osiris was laid. The central and best known is the lion coach, so often depicted because only on it were the regenerated energies of Anubis and rays of Horus summoned. The other two were the cow couch and the hippopotamus coach, known principally from the tomb of Tutankh-Amun. The former referred to Nut/Hat-Hor, presiding over still larval souls in the night of the Duat, Bardo, Barzakh, or inter-incarnational state; the latter, to the hippopotamus monster (the coach has a crocodile tail and taloned, not hooved feet even though a hippopotamus' head) that disintegrated the souls' vehicles and returned it to incarnation on earth, the phenomenon of birth being also presided over by the hippopotamus goddess Ta-urt (Great Earth Mother)." [19]

Pyramids © 1992

In Taoist traditions, one has to die in the previous condition to be reborn into a new, superior state. The butterfly survives the caterpillar's death in the silk-enswathed larva encapsulated in its dark cocoon in the depth of the so-called "underworld," where the invisible covers the visible, and consciousness is gone. In the words of Taoist master Liu I-Ming:

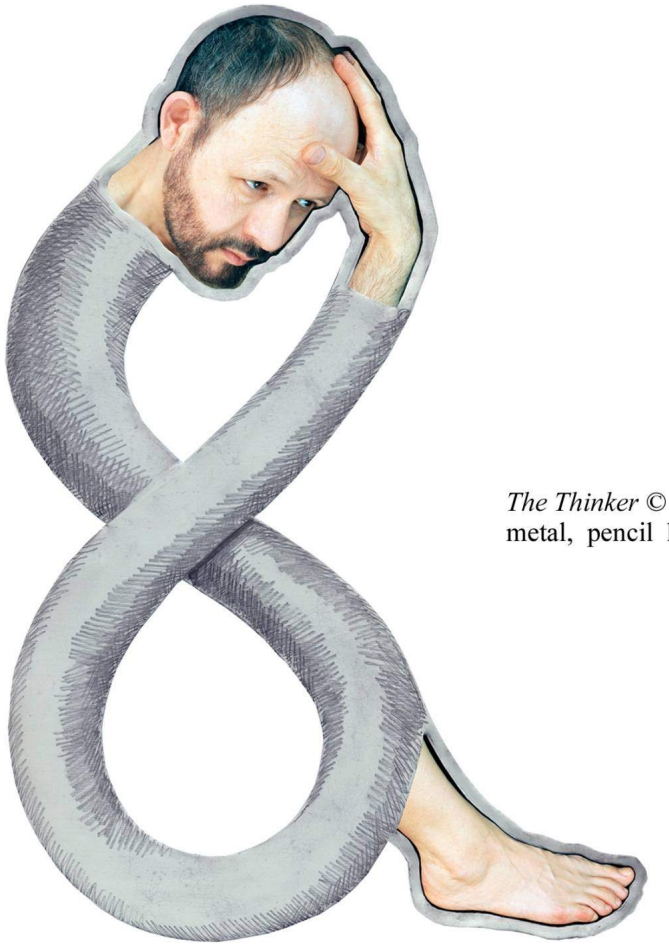
> "At the end of autumn, insects go into hibernation. In the spring, they return to live. Their rebirth is based on their hibernation... The Tao is finding life in the midst of death. The reason people do not attain lasting life is

Yellow Triangle © 2000

the human mentality die; to live means to make the mind of Tao live... Store the spirit and energy away in mystical darkness, and the bit of spiritual root will grow from faintness to clarity, from softness to strength...

Magical Sleeves © 2000

When the process is complete, suddenly you will break through space to reveal the pure spiritual body, leaping beyond the worlds... This is like when the caterpillar, having transformed into a moth, breaks out of its cocoon and flies away." [20]



The Thinker © 1995, photo, metal, pencil hatching

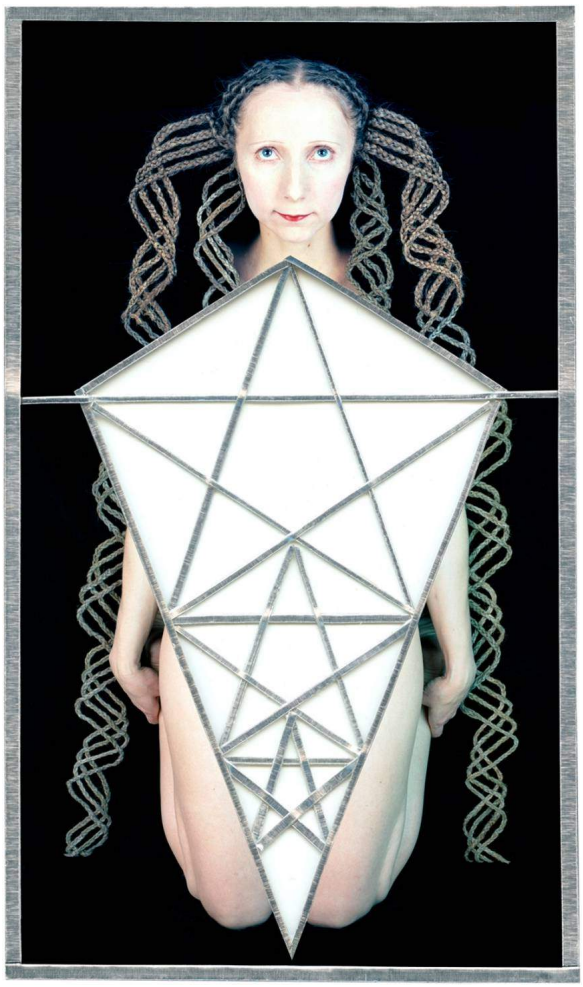
The Ancient Greek thinkers believed the soul secretes its body as a snail secretes its shell. The soul or psyche (*anima*. Lat.) is a nucleus of the human being, the agglomerate essence of the remembered elements of consciousness composing man. In antiquity, the psyche was considered a tripartite compound:

The lowest element is non-rational, responsive to senses and motions,
the intermediate element is of the rational mind,
the higher element is of the intuitive mind.

These divisions do not differ, in essence, radically from the Ancient Egyptian classifications. The materialistic, unregen-

erate man is unconscious of his soul, no matter how he talks about it, especially when drunk. The intermediate rational mind can get nowhere by the spinning arguments about spiritual principles, the depth of which is not defined by society. Like a silkworm that spins its cocoon and gets caught in what it has woven, the mind is caught in the web of its own concepts. As to the higher element of the psyche, it is hard to do it justice in words, for the essence in which our consciousness lives is freed from the weight of the earth. However, all this is, to some extent, connected with reality. In the termin-

Golden Mean © 1995,
photo, metal, cutout



ology of Aristotle, who renamed the components, the soul is divided into vegetal, animal, and rational parts. This classification remained in use until the 19th century.

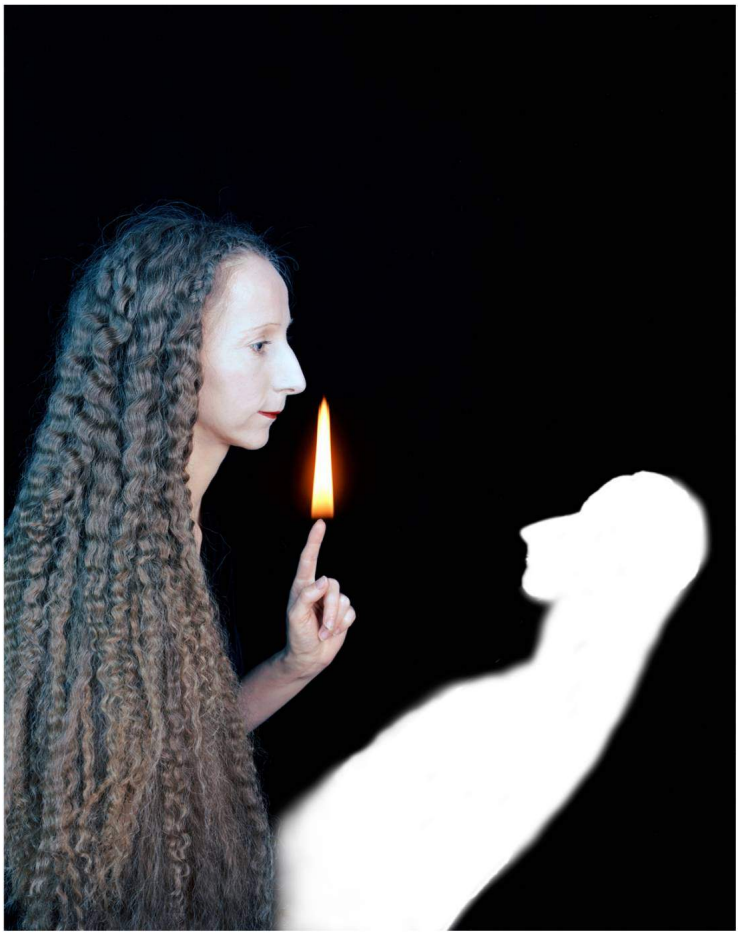
In the Gnostic teaching, the similar tripartite division became the central theme of their "heresy":

> *Hyletics (Hylē,* matter, Grk.), earthbound, materialistic beings;
> *Psychics (Psychē,* soul, Grk.), enveloped in their psychological insight;
> *Pneumatics (Pneuma,* spirit, Grk.) have a spiritual component, a fragment of the divine essence, or a "divine spark."

Embryo © 1997

Both the material and psychological content of the two first categories are considered perishable. Like the larval souls belonging to the ancient Egyptian hippopotamus coach, *hyletics* are ignorant of spiritual realities and their own potential destiny. They have little or no awareness of mental functions, for they are ruled by animal instinct, good for survival but hopeless for spiritual growth. As to *psychics* (similar to those belonging to the Egyptian cow coach), they are overly involved in their emotional life, half-woke but hopeful, confused but questioning. *Pneumatics* (of the lion coach) can be saved by their inner enlightenment awakened by the in-

Shadow © 1997, shadow
is cut out from the photo



dwelling pneumatic "spark" (called the messenger of light). This divine spark is a spiritual alter ego, a counterpart of the self. When awakened, one's personal efforts are suspended; the soul becomes open to influx, receptive to an infusion of grace. In a sense, one becomes helpless as an embryo depending on total un-action. Purity of conduct is the most crucial element in the liberating process of the higher self. The Gnostics avoided the "overdose" of God, which they considered unnecessary to achieve the release in their understanding. All their ideas were stated in live myths rather than in theoretical theology. Despite the gnostic axiom that the spirit raises the soul while the body kills it, the Gospel of Philip says that transcendental knowledge must be received while one is still alive:

> "Those who say they will die first then rise are in error... [Instead they must] receive the resurrection while they live" (73:1-3).

In the eyes of the Christian mystics, this transhumanizing process depends solely on God, who gives birth to Himself in man. People in their natural state are far from being perfect, considering the doctrinal assumption that there is no devil other than ourselves. Hence, the true mystics lived by a simple but difficult creed: one must forget the world, then forget oneself, and find all things in God anew. All temporal things must go if God is to go in. Turning away from trafficking with lower things, one must die to oneself.

Mysticism had many irregularities and variations. Some believed in a solely individual path, while others adhered to the principles of brotherhood in their faith. Walt Whitman interpreted the meaning of brotherhood most individually in his *Song of Myself*

> "I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own."

Many mystics at various periods of history believed that when one is ready, the enlightening force is bound to act – this "birth" of insight comes like a child from the womb. The release from the supervising matrix (comparable to chrysalis) can be sudden as an incomprehensible leap to another level of being when a former recluse is abruptly made aware of spiri-

tual reality. The 17-th-century Carmelite friar Brother Lawrence, the author of the classic Christian book *The Practice of the Presence of God*, described his release as a sudden, unforeseeable event:

> "Often I fell and rose again... When I accustomed myself to the thought that I should end my days in this struggle – though it did not diminish my trust or my faith – I was changed suddenly. My soul, escaping tiresome discussions, attained a profound inward peace, as if it had come to its own home and peace of rest." [21]

Ribs © 1997

It is hard to explain such a situation in terms of concrete reality; the statistics are irrelevant if not from the world of imagination, for the rare exposure to this extraordinary sensation is tied to a particular person at any given time and circumstance. Man himself is an insoluble mystery, and his transfiguration is even more so; add to this the proverbial words of Sallust, "nothing mortal knows that which is immortal." [22] Generally, those who were fortunate more than enough to pass to the next "round" (from chrysalis to imago) experienced an explosive liberation when emerging into the new light, feeling that divine impulse is everywhere. It was

Rose Bush © 2000

not “unwrapping the swathing” but an instant deliverance. That kind of sudden transformation is described by the German mystic Jacob Böhme, who associated the enlightening moment with the resurrection:

> “I can compare such a spiritual triumph only to a miraculous birth in the midst of death. I was like resurrected from the dead... Then, in a quarter of an hour, I understood more than if I had been many years in a university.” [23]

Let us look at the vortex of rebirth from the psychological

Rose Stems © 2003

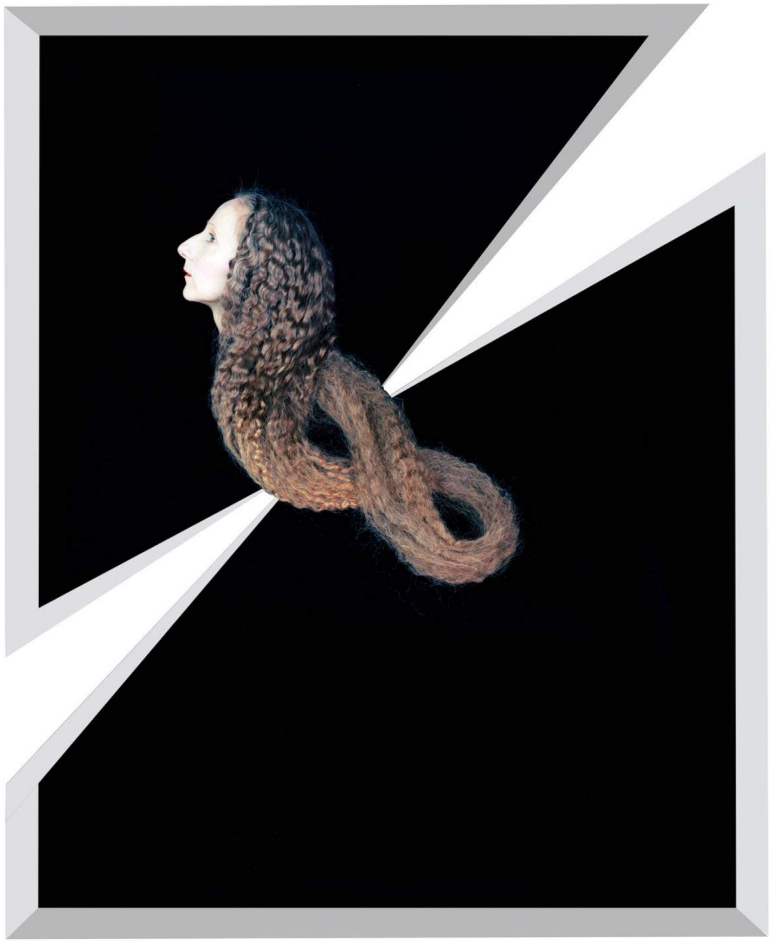
V. G., *Ant* and *Caterpillar*, 1976, 30.5 x 23 x 3 cm, steel erector set, glass, cardboard, paper, text. *Ant* is in collection Zimmerli Art Museum, NJ; *Caterpillar* in The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

level. The metaphoric image of the limited, crawling caterpillar, seemingly doomed to a larval state, symbolizes the virtual changes within the human sympathetic nervous system. The gestation process of the trans-conscious memory that facilitates the awakening is impossible without escaping into detachment. Aside from the uneasy disintegration of the normal structure of existence, everything that is corrupted within and without must be mercilessly destroyed. At that watershed moment, one becomes a mystery to oneself and the others. Despite experiencing the claustrophobic nightmare in metaphorical proportion, the skin-encapsulated ego must overcome the metaphysical fear and let things happen. At that moment, a "supersensitive mutant" may seem encased in the armor of calmness, inaccessible in everyday situations. However, this apparent calmness results from the greatest tension of the nerves, freezing in this uncomfortable state. Involuntarily, the warning of Spinoza comes to mind: "All noble things are as difficult as they are rare." When the

rational mind is faced with irrational factors, the creative tension of spiritual birth evokes a sense of anxiety and especially a fear of loss of identity, "dying" in searching for its own root. One "dies" to be "reborn" or, rather, to appear on a new level. Imagine death as the withdrawal of the electricity of life from the human body when it is broken like a glass bulb. Still, the electric current is not annihilated; it renews with the changing of the bulb.

The idea that death of the self is the gate to life *(mors janua vitae,* Lat.) is as old as mankind. Powers of cathartic and purifying virtue descend upon the soul that itself can do

Dragon Fly © 1998, photo, metal



Sleeping Head © 1994, open eyes are drawn on the closed eyes

nothing but suffer it to happen, thus entering wholly into the process and therein die "continually." The intellect and will are quiet and passive in order to receive the higher tiding; otherwise, the soul cannot be winged up above the material and temporal locking terrestrial plane. Humility and receptivity in silence, stillness, and peace are the most helpful. Out of reach of almost anybody, one lives in the desert of oneself, seemingly returning to an unknown nothingness, the virtual home of one's soul. Opposing forces and simply surrounding people cannot detain the recluse, dragging him to their mundane level. All temporary things are dead. The invisible "I" that thinks, suffers, loves, and hates seems to turn into a

lifeless mass like a bandaged mummy. The mind is deeply engrossed in itself, giving an impression of a cocoon state. There is a certain tension between the intelligence of the heart and the intellect of the brain. In seclusion and detachment from worldly things, all burdening memories, sensuality, and motivated reasoning safely dissolve; instead, other faculties open. Some alluring human capacities, such as cleverness in material enterprises, pride, and other traits that are not the most decent, vanish one by one. In the intensely private interior experience, the allegedly swathed recluse watches the gradual annihilation of self-interests while learn-

Thorax © 1996

ing different modes of thinking and acting. In many religions, the sacrifice of lower masculinity and femininity is the precondition of spiritual rise. Touching the same subject but using a slightly different approach, we wish to stress the healing element of the whole procedure. The cocoon also symbolizes the state of purification, not without losing the link with the above. It takes life and also gives it. Everything taken away from you is always somehow compensated.

Let us imagine how the new mode of being might be qualitatively different from the everyday passing of life. A restructuring of the entire mental anatomy occurs, and then the course of a person's whole life changes radically. Closely allied with the polarity between above and below, one continues to live on the terrestrial level but sees everything with new eyes, perceiving the spiritual properties with exalted, uplifting "aesthetics" that were concealed before. The paradoxical, trans-logical form of knowledge brought back from the invisible induces a sense of sacredness and hitherto unknown mental freedom, not subject to the limitations of the physical three-dimensional world. The intellect is ruled by wisdom above time, apart from time, which is extraordinary to our present state. This space-time fluidity allows one to leap from three-dimensional to multidimensional perception, rising Phoenix-like from the ashes of the past. Simply put, one emerges from that animal state from which science tells us we are issued.

In the light of actuality, it must be added that this rebirth has to be understood in the sense of a new mode of being, not on the physical level but in the consciousness. With the revelation of the reintegrated benevolent order, all instinctive impulses are converted into intuition in an expanded form, turning man inside out so that now he uses all his powers unselfishly. The nucleus of the self is based on energy rather than matter, or the same subtle matter as that from which our souls are formed. As a survivor of his own "burial," the former recluse tends toward a positive frame of mind, detecting now an atemporal beatitude of the spirit, uninhibited of the flux of history. Thus, consciousness-altering qualities and self-enhancing habit patterns make one stable connection in the new life on its supersensual level of perception, where one can be tempted but not overcome. Mircea Eliade rendered these ideas closely enough in his book *The Sacred*

and the Profane:

> "The initiatory birth implied death to profane existence... followed by a new birth... For every human existence is formed by a series of ordeals, by repeated experience of 'death' and 'resurrection.'" [24]

There is a belief that souls have wings, while their "bodies" are like waves of light. In mythology, the wings symbolize swift thought, creative inspiration, love, or a sense of numi-

Seraph © 1994

Green Grass © 1998

nosity, rising one above. “The net is spread in vain before the eyes of them that have wings” (2 Cor. 12:5). Magic flight stands for comprehension of sacred things; “intelligence *(manus,* Skrt.) is the swiftest of birds,” says *Rg-Veda* (VI, 9:5). God Kronos, depicted on the Phoenician coins, has four wings on his shoulders, signifying that he flies while at rest and rests in flight. God Hermes/Mercury has wings of speed and mobility; the Babylonian lion with eagle wings is an emblem of wisdom and power. In medieval illuminated manuscripts, astral bodies are depicted with wings as if functioning on superb spiritual heights and dwelling in the cosmos as their city. Chinese tradition says that the flapping of a

Out of the Shell © 1997

butterfly's wings is felt on the other side of the world, with a view toward the butterfly effect. In many belief systems, the soul or anima has been given wings so it can fly. Mephistopheles said about the winged soul compared to a butterfly: if you pluck its wings off, it's just a nasty worm. That is how he explains the caterpillar-butterfly transition in reverse when the soul loses its wings and falls to Earth.

This brings us naturally to the myth of the graceful Psyche, a symbol of a winged soul and an embodiment of transformation and rebirth in antique arts. Frequently, she was depicted with butterfly wings flying from the shackles of the body's "chrysalis." The word "psyche" generally means

"life," which does not interfere with its other meanings in Greek, to name a few: soul, self, mind, spirit, invisible ghost, and entity occupying the physical body. Psyche is the linguistic progenitor of such terms as "psychology," "psychiatry," "psychopathy," and other related properties of the soul, from spiritually elated to insane and dead souls.

Before turning to the philosophical interpretation of this subject in Greco-Roman culture, let us look at the fable of the princess Psyche with the eyes of Apuleius, as he narrated it in *The Metamorphoses* or *The Golden Ass (Asinus aureus.* Lat.) in book 4-6. Psyche possesses the ultimate beauty, which even Venus (Greek Aphrodite) does not have. Hence, the goddess is jealous and prosecutes Psyche, arranging her betrothal with the monstrous creature. Venus's son Cupid (Greek Eros, the principle of love, desire, and mystical union) saves her and becomes her mysterious invisible husband. But he must leave her soon enough after she looks at him by lamplight despite his repeated warnings, for she is not supposed to see him. As the saying goes, you must keep secrecy because of the value of what you see and learn. Abandoned and persecuted by Venus, Psyche is forced to undergo several hard trials to reunite with her husband. After she gets the box of beauty, the gift for Venus from Proserpine (Greek Persephone, the queen of the underworld), Psyche opens it. Instead of the beauty aids she hopes to find, a cloud of underworld darkness rises from the mysterious box, putting her into a deep sleep. Thus, her mortal life comes to an end. Instead, Cupid awakes her with his arrow, and as soon as they reunite, Jupiter gives her the drink of gods, ambrosia, transforming her into an immortal goddess of the soul. Starting as a mortal born with tender grace and beauty, Psyche becomes an immortal. Representing a psychological archetype of a soul brought into time, she reconciles the beauty of the visible and the invisible, the world of outer form with the inner realm.

For Ancient Greek philosophers, the human psyche, a principle of animate life, was a mediator between mind and body, ideas and matter, maintaining the closeness to the divine world and continuity between death and life. Pythagoreans said that the psyche is a "number moving itself." The psyche's envelope or vehicle is made of corporeal *pneuma* ("breath of life," Grk.), surrounding it as if a phantom,

forming the joint between the body and the soul. With all its ontological secrets, the soul lives on after death, unhindered by the body, and it is better able to achieve wisdom. The soul is like an idea: internal, invisible, and intangible. The spirit

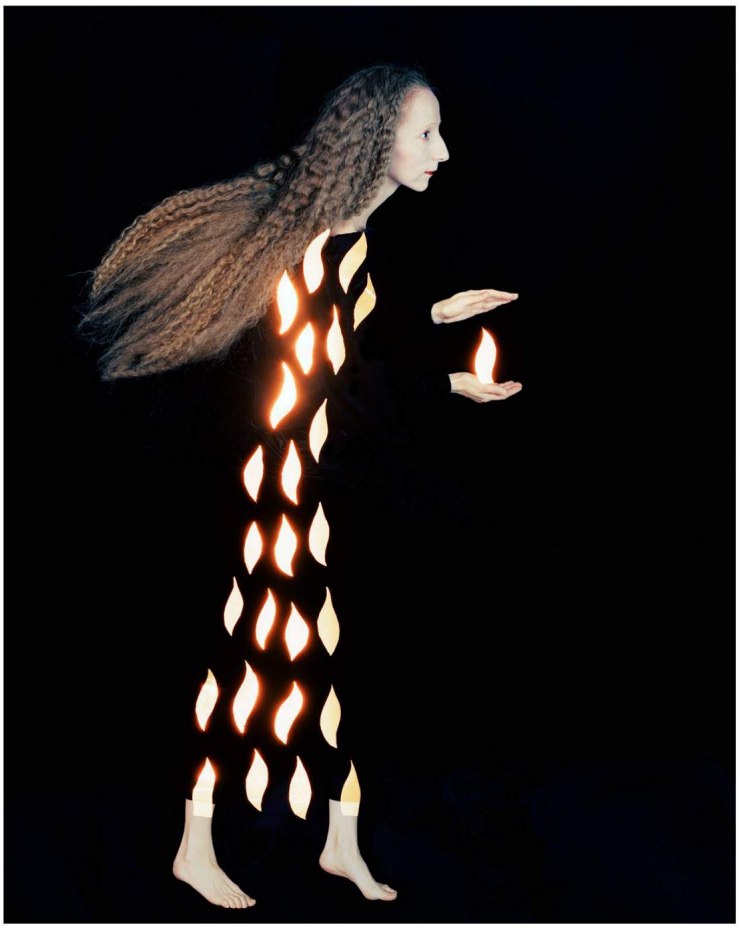
Psyche © 1997

can reach the material level through the intermediary of the soul, which is probably why the spirit was called "the soul of the soul." The passage of the psyche *(nimae transitus,* Lat.) was reflected, or rather, reenacted in Eleusinian mystery,

whose ultimate design was to lead man back to the principle from which he descended. In *Timeous* (36 B-E), Plato tells us that the World Soul has the form of the Greek cross X, with an intersection point of the equinox; in this way, it brings ideas into the world. Plotinus believed that not all of the human soul sinks into the body, but a part of it remains in the divine plane.

As to the oriental parallels (of which there are plenty) to the World Soul and spiritual birth per se, we can take the nativity of Tantric Shakti, a goddess associated with the rising Kundalini power. She appeared as a fountainhead of the united primeval force, flaming from fiery clouds created

Fiery Robe © 1998



by the joint fiery breath of all other gods. Mircea Eliade connected this blazing "incident" with the feminine principle in his book *Yoga, Immortality, and Freedom*:

> "Woman incarnates both the mystery of creation and the mystery of being, of everything that is, that incomprehensibly becomes and dies and is reborn... Philosophically, the rediscovery of the Goddess is bound up with the carnal condition of spirit in the Kali-yuga." [25]

If on a male face, we usually depicted various forms of action such as a volcano, magnet, or mental *Divine Comedy* with its division into heaven, purgatory, and hell, then the female image is usually associated with the classical symbol of Psyche, a soul in Greek, with its figurative meaning of butterfly. To get freedom from the bondage of the flesh and the cycle of reincarnations wandering in *samsara* ("karmic cyclicity of life," Skrt.) is possible only when one reaches the stage when further earthly experiences a re no longer necessary, for one is refined to a state of manifested divinity. Concerning the Eastern analog of the Western notion of "virginity of the soul," Mircea Eliade writes:

> "There are *arhats* who have entered nirvana without possessing any of the five miraculous powers, but no one has ever reached it without possessing the 'knowledge of the disappearance of vice,' which alone can confer sanctity." [26]

Mentally synthesizing all stages of transformations, we sought in our works to reflect the intersection of different layers of existence, directly physical and indirectly metaphysical, projecting them in a single artistic "organon." As for the metaphor of a butterfly springing out of its larval state, it is laid down by nature and is imbued with magical properties in many cultures. Converting itself to itself, the transhuman, superconscious part of the winged psyche is essential for this transformation. A freely fluttering butterfly, a master of metamorphosis, does not look back on its life as a caterpillar, though we have no direct way to check it out.

4: PRAYER, SILENCE, SOLITUDE

All things can be envisioned on an ascending or descending scale (most of our impulses are double-edged), the scale in which everything is shifting circle-by-circle, tier-on-tier, equally extending toward the above and the below, spiraling toward infinity in both directions. Each action sets a reaction. The principle of folding and unfolding is embodied very diversely in *Photoreliefs*, featuring organic ways of growth, geometrical constructions, spirals, cones, origami, twisting and turning, and loops with a non-orientable surface.

Fire Cord © 2009, photo, metal, pencil shading

We always let ideas and images come to us, never trying to go and fetch them. A certain plasticity sets in as the work evolves, as if music guides the movements of the body and bending shapes. This process has many unexpected turns, hopefully without violating the "law" of chance. Quite adroitly, these challenges were described by Winnie-the-Pooh:

> "A Thing which seemed very thingish inside you is quite different when it gets out into the open and has other people looking at it" (A. A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh).*

This observation "out of the mouth of babes" fully applies to our works, particularly the relief *Möbius Strip* bent into a fluffy loop. How can we convey our thoughts and feelings about this well-known phenomenon in mathematics and physics to the viewers for whom this work might look like a yarn of wooly hair framed in a twisted way? It may sound

Möbius Strip © 1993,
photos, metal

absurd, as visualization of imagined reality overlaps with the actual art object. Thrown back into the paradoxes of the *Möbius Strip* that has only one side and one edge, we imagined it as a bridge, projective in all respects: between matter and spirit, past and future, a plane of life and an afterlife. All is connected, interacted, wired up, and interwoven into one whole. The vision of art is in itself a free interpretation with (or without) an intellectual shift.

Island © 2008, photo, brushed aluminum

In general, all metal reliefs enhance the illusory impact of photography. As expected, the influence is mutual: the metal sculptures featuring fanciful forms obtain another type of magic – a magic of the human presence. The half-opened metal box titled *Revival* is also some sort of a cubic chrysalis or, rather, a bud from which a new life emerges, flashing as a plant in the spring. Despite the static nature of the object, it

demonstrates the dynamic process of autonomic revitalization in the hands of a focused illusionist. However, the point is not in the dexterity of the hands but, possibly, in their natural plasticity, demonstrating not the skill of the fakir but the property of the conductor of low resistance. Insead of strict control, the throughput allows energy to circulate freely – that is when things happen. The ability to receive, pass, and release, combined with a relaxed state of receiving and transmitting energy, is the key to the spontaneous flowering of

Revival © 2008, photo, brushed aluminum

intuitive qualities. The principle of their application can be quite conscious but without any intellectual tricks. Everything happens in the tone of calm self-evidence. In this way, air circulates in the living thing through internal breathing. Mixing poetic and prosaic language, the metal box *Revival* opens its secret, depicting a state of no need for firm control, allowing things to happen, as with plant life.

> "The grey undergrowth looked no more alive than firewood. Yet every twig in it was waiting for the spring" (E. M. Forster, *The Longest Journey).*

The ability to let go is a clue to the flowering of the intuitive faculties while tuning spontaneity with a conscious way of doing it.

In the psychology of intellect, the physical and the metaphysical can contradict each other; hence, images can be born through antitheses. One can transmit ideas to the outer world through the exaltation of the inner state. The path of return to the outside lies within. The triple fold of *Prayer* contains a hint of precisely this. The figure clad in a haircloth is subtle and thin, almost bodiless, like a piece of paper folded in thirds. The heart is upward, while the eyes are downward. To some extent, the image creates a feeling of a sublimated state inherent in prayerful revelation. "Folded" in silence, the body belongs to some kind of emptiness. Silent words, empty desires, and disappeared thoughts are more like a question to an answer, not vice versa. Perhaps the logos was also preceded by silence. "In the hierarchy of creation, all things pray except the First," the old maxim goes. If we dare to put in writing any such reflections, we would instead use an improbable question rather than a definite answer.

Who has God a glimpse?

There are illusions as without so within; many traps exist in worldly life, and so are in contemplation and introspection. Very pious people, in particular, tend to imagine themselves surrounded by the divine aura, "marinating" in holiness through their ceaseless rounds of chanting and prayer. The latter is of no use unless it is charged with the force of love and utter sincerity, for one has to believe more with the heart

than with the mouth. An inward, soundless prayer may fill all the emptiness so as to leave no room for anything else, maintaining the silence of words, thoughts, and desires. Both as the vehicle and the channel, prayer helps to raise the mind to the above, directing one's mental makeup to the sphere beyond the physical, attuning to inspiration, wisdom, strength, and healing. One's whole being is then aimed at it like an arrow.

When writing *The Brothers Karamazov,* Fyodor M. Dostoevsky traveled together with the philosopher Vladimir Solovyov to the Optina Monastery, a spiritual Mecca for

Prayer © 2006/2009, photos,
stainless steel, 90.2 x 134 cm

Russians. The monks of Optina (not far from the town Tula) practiced hesychasm (*hesychia* means "stillness," "quiet," and "silence," Grk.), which is the mystical path of meditations, prayer, and specific psychosomatic techniques having some similarity with the Indian *Bhakti* Yoga of devotion. The most significant aspect of hesychasts' mystical training concerns solitary life and the incessant prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me." Often, it is accompanied by prostrations, specific sitting postures, and rhythmical breathing. After long practice without ceasing, the prayer sinks into the heart and rolls itself day and night, whether one is asleep or

Suspended Thoughts © 2002

Silence © 2001

awake. Epiphanizing the prayer, hesyhasts tried to be in a constant state of prayer, moving their mind from the head into the heart and holding it there. This method of absorption in contemplating God is described in the book *The Way of a Pilgrim* by an anonymous nineteenth-century Russian author. The chronicle of his travels and spiritual inquiries was translated into English. It profoundly influenced J.D. Salinger, who described this wanderer's spiritual practice with incisive power and candor in his book *Franny and Zooey*.[21] Not to be unfounded, we give the morning meditation prayer of the elders at Optina:

> "Govern our thoughts and feelings in everything we do or say, granting us the wisdom of when to speak and when to remain silent...
>
> Teach and guide us that we conduct ourselves in all sincerity and reasonableness toward every other human being, helping us that we bring neither confusion, doubt, nor sorrow to anyone.
>
> Bestow upon us, O Lord, strength to endure the weariness this day's labor will bring, and give us the courage that each of us may bear his full share in all its tasks and events.
>
> Guide Thou our willing, teaching us to pray, to believe, to hope, to bear, to forgive, and – above all – to love." [28]

There is a relationship between prayers, thoughts, and actions. To elucidate this connection, one needs to understand how human thoughts, clusters of them, function in a public environment. People do not realize that harmful thoughts are being rained down in all directions, thrown out by minds infected with impure passions, envy, lust, fear, and so on. It is not for nothing that hermits flee from populated areas to avoid the attack of invisible mental energy condensed to various abnormalities. If a depraved person accidentally gets into the hermit's refuge, he leaves there a whole army of his unclean thoughts endowed with vitality. Swarming around, they disturb the peace of the hermit, making him fight those feelings he had already conquered by intense praying. An ardent and sincere impulse toward heaven creates protection from fluidic larval thoughts. Many Christian theologians tried to put their minds into the words of their prayers, which were given to them proved by time. Meister Eckhart never prayed for spiritual gifts but for making him worthy of them:

> "When I pray for something, I do not pray. When I pray for nothing, I really pray... To pray for anything except God's will might seem idolatry." [29]
>
> "While I am here, He is in me; after this life, I am in Him." [30]

Entrance © 1992, photo, brushed aluminum

Some mystics divided the prayers into three strata: animal, rational, and spiritual, according to the three orders of mankind, which have different degrees of understanding (low, middle, and high). Prayer is a symbol of aspiration toward the response from the Higher of which people are dimly conscious. All organized religions have been developed to assist the masses, while the mystical undercurrent in many of them was reserved for the individuals seeking to establish direct inward contact or even fuse with the divine presence. Those deeply involved in mysticism, with subtle minds and noble characters, understood prayer on different

levels, equally alien to learned scholars and believing housewives. Proficient mystics graded their practices into four states: “emptiness,” “nothingness,” “entire surrender,” and “peaceful love in life naughted.” [31]

MIND: letitgoletitgoletitgoletitGOD...

Single-hearted devotion could lead to a state wherein it was difficult not to think of God as it was at the beginning to think of Him. The orison (archaic for prayer, from oracion, “speech,” Lat.), also known as St. Francis’ prayer, also indicates growing degrees of self-negation in a distinctly poetic form, crossing denials by assertions:

> “May we seek not so much to be consoled as to console,
> Not so much to be understood as to understand,
> Not so much to be loved as to love.
> For it is in giving that we receive.
> It is pardoning that we are pardoned.
> It is in dying that we awake to eternal life.” [32]

Triangle © 1989

The Jesuit Ignatius of Loyola was particularly engaged in systematically developing the theory and principles of a prayer, insisting in his *Spiritual Exercises* that prayer must light up within and act of itself. It should be short and pure, with passive expectancy and active openness. As a former soldier suffering all his life from wounds, he insisted on self-conquest in any condition and strict self-discipline, saying that a Jesuit must be empty of ego as is a corps. “Grant me a loving humility,” wrote he in his *Diary*. There is something about the deepest humility that makes one bold, enduring all earthly shocks and personal pain, overcoming the resistance

Cross Hands © 1996

In front of the Cathedral © 1992

of the body, despite the rebellion of entire nature. Loyola's practice of prayer is radically different from those inclined to the long prayers as a way to achieve a god-intoxicated state:

> "For a truly mortified man, a quarter of an hour is enough to unite himself with God in prayer... Of a hundred persons making a profession of lofty prayer, ninety at least are deluded... One should reflect that man does not serve God only when he prays." [33]

However, "to pray without ceasing" is not to utter many words. Every spoken word narrows down the meaning. Therefore, the ascetic method of hesyhasts' prayer was based on gradually reducing the number of words until it was brought down to a single word. This was practiced for several months. The principle of the reduction was as follows: "Lord

Jesus Christ, have mercy on me" turns into "Lord Jesus, have mercy on me," then "Jesus, have mercy on me," then "Jesus, mercy on me," and finally "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus..."

Prayer is only an instrument of connection, not the connection itself, and as an instrument, it is subjected to imperfection. Having a maze of words, it may lack acute integrity and internal unity. Exceeding verbosity converts the unlimited meaning into the limited, and certain distortions creep into the senses. The language of archetypes is brief and evocative, like mantras with numinous auras. Mystical primal evocations contain not one meaning but all meanings. It was

Solicitor © 2000

believed that one had to be initiated into the words of power or holy Logos, for it was sacrilegious to impose one's own subjective word because it has to be born out of magical power that is objective. A brief "extreme" prayer and mantra have a life of their own and can say more than they mean.

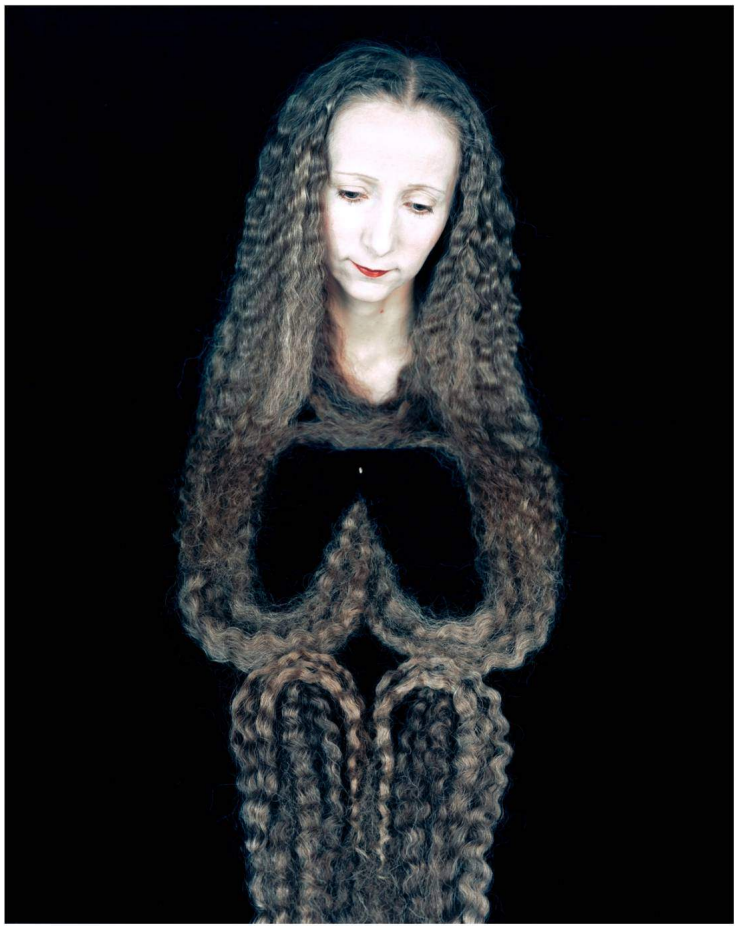
Each person forms for himself an image of a higher power according to one's mode, and the chosen prayer agrees with the quality and intensity of one's belief. Following this principle, we prayed through our art, more subconsciously than consciously, which made us one voice. Fusing technique with inspiration, we envisioned prayer differently every time:

Face to Face ©2001

it appeared in the shape of the hair-made *Cathedral* depicted in the devotional pose; it was unrolled as a scroll or opened like a book. To some extent, visualization is also a "creative prayer" that prays itself. It fosters latent intimation of a state beyond both the intellect and material environment.

To immerse sensually in this process, imagine the prayer of Joan of Arc and her emergence from nature's clutches. Historically, she inspired many litanies for courage, strength, and the ability to withstand adversity, qualities that are especially potent when provocations, temptations, or difficult situations arise. Her unwavering belief in her mission could

Cathedral © 1998



ignite a war or immediately stop it, so passionate and fiery it was. One has only to recall her words before being burned at the stake for her faith: "Hold the cross high so I may see it through the flames," or "I am not a book: I am the daughter of God." Many painters depicted her earthly agony; perhaps, our image can fit into this sorrowful category but in a rather peculiar way. Far from the canons of classical art, our image of *Joan of Arc* is a *Photorelief* with metal elements, producing a three-dimensional illusion. She is clad in shining knight armor featuring skeletal contours, ominously emphasizing her ribs. Her pose and the pseudo-volume create tension and release, generating a picture of her martyrdom and self-sacrifice. One more important detail: the supporting hands belting the armor belong to someone from the beyond as if illustrating her assertion: "I die for speaking the language of the angels." This may recall the apocryphal saying: "The angels sing in silence." [34] Visual language is soundless, but a silent word of the spiritual warrior encourages others, as in her case.

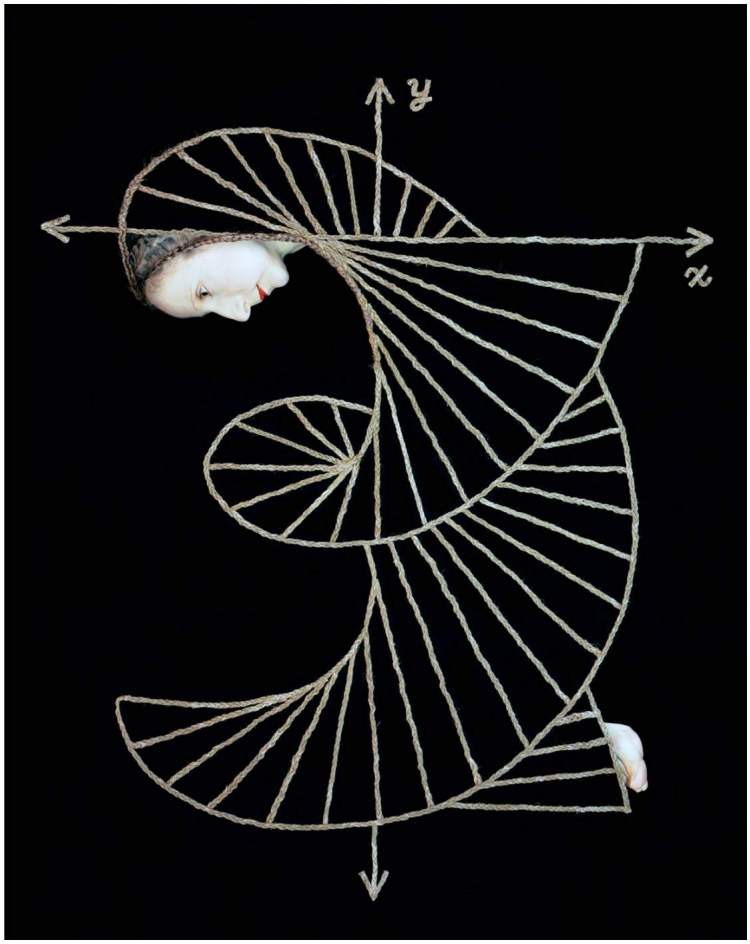
One more French woman blessed with suffering, Madame de Guyon, left an unusual legacy about mystical prayer and the principles of Quietism. Her interior experiences, described in her later book *The Autobiography of Madame Guyon (Vie de Madame Guyon)*, developed in three stages. First, she attained the state known as "the presence of God," almost as a tangible reality. Detached from the entire world in silence, she remained in this state for eight years. Then she experienced "mystical death," losing the sense of God's grace and all spiritual interests; that crisis lasted for seven years. Finally, she re-awakened in an absolute new condition, finding that she did not possess God as before, but God possessed her. So she began acting without reflections, renouncing all personal interests as if the Divine effluence filled her in a state of pure love. Becoming God's instrument, she described these revelations in her small book, *A Short and Easy Method of Praying (Moyen court et très facile de faire oraison*, 1685), based on her tripartite interior experience. The book became a hit in Paris, so the Roman Catholic Church began to prosecute her. The ideas of Quietism inspired many to practice silence and prayer, and by choosing their individual spiritual path, they did not need the mediation of the clergy. She was incriminated in sinful derogation

from the precepts of the Catholic Church. Madame de Guyon was arrested by order of Louis the XIV and locked in the Bastille in a solitary cell. She was often interrogated and accused of praying in quiet, bypassing the clergy. After five years in the Bastille, they let her live with her daughter in the village, where she was visited by a stream of pilgrims. Her book, *Vie de Madame Guyon,* was published in 1704 in the Netherlands and became very popular. In France, it was not published until 1772, fifty years after her death.

Joan of Arc © 1994, photos, metal, pencil shading

Let us turn from real historical figures to unreal art, in which the imagination joins the perception in the interpreting sub- and super-stratum of the visible reality. Many metamorphic changes in the ongoing world are reflected in art, spiced with scientific elements mixed with fiction. The oblique *Helicoid*, a circular helix with an axis in three-dimensional space, also can be introduced as a geometrical prayer. Helically repeated patterns – visual wordless "chanting" – can extend infinitely, wrapping around the central vertical with a variable pitch. This somewhat humanized stairway, formed of a flattened spiral, may have the same meaning as Jacob's

Helicoid © 1996



dream of the ladder. Climbing along this ladder to the sky gave him prophetic abilities in the biblical world. In terms of modern biology, our *Helicoid* does not contradict such a possibility, for DNA molecules have the form of a double helix, carrying our genetic code. The same can be applied to the literary field: a good writer can outline any destiny in helicoid-like up-and-down patterns as byproducts of a spiral path of *Kundalini* ("coiled," Skrt.). Its energy awakens insight, revelations, prophetic abilities, and much more. Its two *nadis* ("channels," Skrt.), *Ida* ("cool moon energy," Skrt.) and *Pingala* ("orange sun energy," Skrt.), follow a helical path

Sitting Place © 1997

upwards, wrapping around the central axis of *Shushumna* ("very gracious," Skrt.). Parenthetically, helical formations are found in proteins and many natural structures, like birds' wings or nautilus shells. Various mantras/prayers are believed to awaken *Kundalini's* energy, directing it up the spine through the chakras. This brings us to an Eastern approach to prayer and aspiration.

The most popular Indian mantra is *OM* or *AUM*. pronounced in the heart with utter concentration, void of uncontrolled associations and memories. The sound "A" belongs to the waking state; "U" is the dreaming state of the Moon; "M"

Foot Set © 1997

is the circle of fire or the dreamless deep sleep, and the following silence called *"turiya"* ("the fourth state," Skrt.) is a cataleptic state associated with the superconscious or *samadhi* ("total self-collectedness," Skrt.). In the words of Mircea Eliade,

> "The final objective is to transform the whole cosmos into a vast sonorous theophany." [35]

In *Mahabharata* (XII, 241:3), it is said that the yogi must cut off five sins: sexual desire *(kama*), wrath *(krodha)*, greed *(lobha), fear (bhaya*), and dullness *(svapna)*. *Bhakti* yoga, a

Yogi © 1996

On the String © 2006

method of selfless devotion, aims to gain the *unio mystica* between the soul (*atman*) and its God (Krishna) with infinite bliss. Not only do yogis repeat holy formulas for their mystical and magical effect, but the incessant repetition of the mantras is still widespread among lay people all over India. Holy words have holy vibrations. Eastern mantras inspire devotion and uplift the spirit as auto-suggestion, creating subconscious orientation toward the above and the higher self or *atman.* One must retreat into the ground of one's own soul, sink down into the self to fuse with the infinite, following the old precept: *Atmani, atmanam,*

atmana" ("know the *Atman* in the *atman* through the *atman*," Skrt.), as formulated in the *Bhagavad Gita* (6:5,13:25).

However, tranquility, joy, and love found in incessantly chanting mantras or arduous praying to God could be misleading. *Japa* or manta chanting can induce a pleasant trance or self-amusing devotional mood. This may, therefore, suggest that the devotee does not enliven his faith but takes it for the rule of his conduct, thus enjoying and loving himself rather than God while resting in false idleness. In reality, the rapturous state, taken for a supernatural illumination, may be simply an identification with the ecstatic emotions. Rather than listing vulnerabilities associated with chanting mantras, it is better to draw attention to the credible things deserving of respect.

The most famous Buddhist mantra, *om mani padme hum* ("praise to the jewel in the lotus," Skrt.), when repeated endlessly, becomes fully automatic, circling round and round inside the head, and, according to its practitioners, inspires peace, joy, and love. Repeated with the whole heart, it becomes fixed on the background of the consciousness – it sticks to it. Chanted mentally or vocally many times daily, this mantra remains with the devotee even during sleep. Buddhists believe that its unstopping, enlightening activity purifies passions and, by influencing them hypnotically, defends against attacks from lower thoughts, thus letting one dwell in a state of placidity and equanimity.

Sufi repetition of holy words (*dhikr*, "remembrance") is supposed to be practiced to the point of self-annihilation in God. "Keep God in remembrance till self is forgotten," wrote Sufi poet Shams Tabrizi. The strict rules were set in the guidelines entitled *Let the Seeker*:

> "Let him reduce his heart to a state in which the existence of anything and its non-existence are the same to him... Then, as he sits alone in solitude, let him not cease saying continually with his tongue, 'Allah, Allah,' keeping his thoughts on it. At last, he will reach a state when the motion of his tongue will cease, and it will seem as though the word flowed from it... Let him still preserve until the form of the word, its letters and shape, is removed from his heart, and there remains the idea alone." [36]

Symbols are not substitutes for reality; they simply point at it. Praying honestly, one tries to connect with the higher life force to the extent of one's understanding and capacity. In that, we might be nearer to God than we think. However, one must not disregard that people measure their God by themselves but not themselves by Him. Prayer is a conductor, not a creator. In a way, our art has the same nexus-like function. Visual expression differs from its verbal counterpart. Nearing the completeness of meaning, words no longer help but hinder, and silence becomes more powerful. With language, its figures of speech, allegories, and similitudes, one cannot explain the unspeakable and unlimited. It needs a more plastic medium, more as the product of a divine gift than a human effort. Truth is unutterable; it is inbreathed only by spirit. Unlike the soaring rhetoric, visual art can "speak" with a silent grace. Artists try to dig out hidden meanings in everything through visualization. The more these meanings are interior, infused with the spirit, the easier they transcend the actual words of prayer and become mute. Visualization can compress many meanings into one image representing the unlimited, pointing to it but not revealing it. Likewise, the prayer is a call to that beyond the prayer. Moreover, it becomes irrelevant when the realization occurs.

When all vowels disappear from "silence," it is reduced to *slnc,* which rustling sound almost escapes the ear.

s

l

n

c

The word loses its voice, shrinking to silence. The fragmented work, with its illusion of a volumetric composition, is made in a half-material, half-immaterial way. The image folded in silence seems to repose in its alleged nakedness. Whispering consonants filter external sounds. Tuning to the inner ear evokes a contemplating mood and "visual" consciousness. The series of "speechless" images lost their imposing notions of thoughts, filling their gaps with a new sensibility akin to music, architectural fantasy, or mythological mystifications. They were quietly easing the mind. As in the human head, there are two organs of hearing, two of sight,

and two of smell, but only one of speech, and it became silent at this point.

What is the *secretum silentii ?* The secret of silence is not merely the negation of sound but the state in which one can

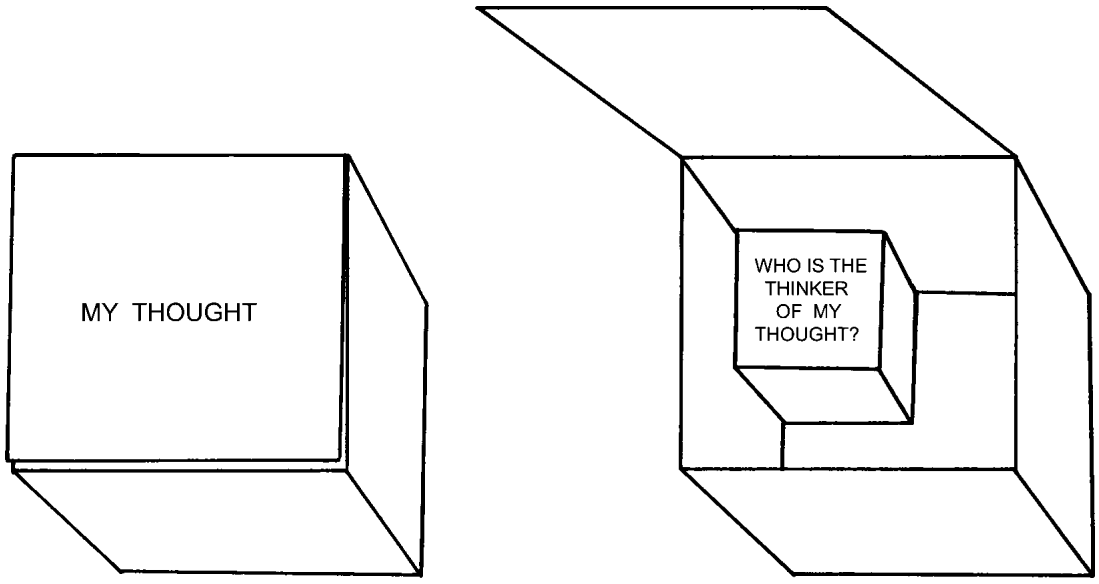
Silence © 1992, photos, metal

renounce all thoughts in favor of THOUGHT, not inventing but receiving living ideas. In revelatory silence, the mental stillness can become so intense that all thoughts will merge fluently in their essential principle. Silence can become the language of worship, speaking by tranquil grace that does not react to people's words – it is impossible to convey either by

images turned invisible or words grown mute. But in a solitary, silent state, when the body is reduced to absolute quietude, the meditator can lift oneself above oneself, becoming sponge-like for infusion of great breath. As a supreme storehouse of power, knowledge lies buried in its deeper recesses, in intangible stillness. But as soon as one talks about one's profound experience, it diminishes. By its very essence, this contemplative state may be incomprehensible and incommunicable to those who have not been touched by it. You may believe the expertise of the fourth-century B.C. philosopher Chuang Tzu, who paved the obscure and silent way of Chinese Tao:

> "Words exist because of meaning; once you've got the meaning, you can forget the words. Where can I find a man who has forgotten words so I can have a word with him?" [37]

It is challenging to hash your own thoughts, even though you can be damn good at not speaking and hiding as if a natural pearl oyster. Sometimes, it is easier to keep silent than to speak, but this does not prevent entanglement in intense mental activity, racing thoughts, or excessive inner talk. The



mind must know how to remain silent, about which Hemingway ironically noticed: “It takes two years to learn to speak and 60 to learn to keep quiet.” To purge the words of their extraverted power by making them silent is not equal to the silence of the mind when it is protected or even released from

Myself - My Slave © 1989

itself. Silence is said to be golden; we guard our secrets by keeping our lips sealed. There are many kinds of silence: intimate, awkward, guilty, submissive, proud, or silence of speech, will, desire, and so on. People share respectful silence that brings them together in the moment; some use it as a weapon of choice or method to get to know others better. There is a dignified silence of a wise born of knowledge and silence of a dull, empty mind born of ignorance. In this regard, Hermann Hesse gave a vivid picture of the introver-

sion in his novel *Damian*:

> '"We talk too much,' Damian said with unwanted seriousness. 'Clever talk is absolutely worthless. All you do in the process is lose yourself. And to lose yourself is a sin. One has to be able to crawl completely inside, like a tortoise.'" [38]

We dare to suppose that silence is actually a mode of activity, not just a refraining from speaking. In the reticent hiddenness, disengaged from things, the moments of magic are born, which can be easily lost if exposed. The intense silence – more vast and emphatic than many holy scriptures – destroys delusions produced by maya. In yogi's understanding, the truth of Supreme Brahman is proclaimed through silent eloquence, keeping a flaming spirit bathed in a void, the place of the spirit's hidden gestation. It also was the determining factor in the traditions of mysticism in Europe, of which Evelyn Underhill wrote in her classic study on this subject:

> "The mystics have always insisted that 'be still, be still, and know' is the condition of man's purest and most direct apprehension of reality... The passivity at which they appear to aim is really a state of the most intense activity... In it, the superficial self compels itself to be still in order that it may liberate another more deep-seated power... The paradoxical 'quiet' of the contemplative is but the outward stillness essential to inward work... He must 'sink into the nothingness,' into the blank abiding place where busy, clever reason cannot come. The whole of this process, this gathering up and turning 'inward' of the powers of the self, this gazing into the ground of the soul, is that which is called introversion." [39]

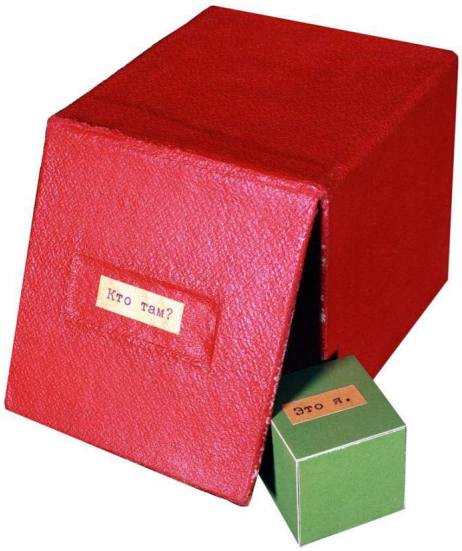
Aside from mystical practices, silence might appear as a state dictated by profound necessities. If thoughts bring trouble, why not stop thinking and take refuge in silence. It seems easy, but in practice, even simple qualities such as convenient restraint and reticent taciturnity might be unattainable in awkward moments. The aphoristic title of Samuel Heaney's

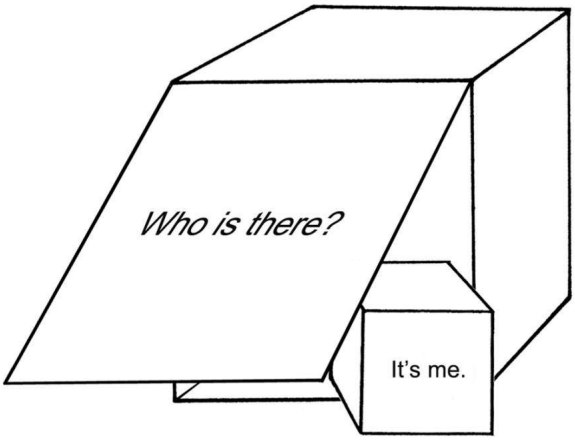
poem *Whatever You Say, Say Nothing* suggests a good tactic to prevent certain nuisances. We are not advocates of practicing Zen-like silence, but when one feels like talking, it's better to temper the words with insight and reservation and get acquainted with your inner world. Sometimes, there is no need to fill silence with words, especially when people understand words but cannot understand the ideas behind them.

One concept automatically leads to the other: the notion of silence might entangle comparative rest and isolation needed for focusing. One has to learn how to be alone with

Read My Lips © 2002

oneself. A person inclined to a state of *intimus internus* and self-analyses soon discovers that he can be his own society. Some souls want to be so free that they cannot even be bound by their freedom. No wonder introverts need solitude to recuperate from interactions with extroverts. The mystery of individuation cannot be solved by society. In most cases, social impulses do not rest directly upon the attachment to society but often upon the fear of loneliness. People try to enlarge their egos into the ego of the world mainly because of personal insecurity. However, well-being resides in what one has in the very depth of oneself. That is why some rare indi-





R.G., *Who Is There?* 1974, cardboard, paper, fabric, wood, 8 cm^3, collection of Center Pompidou

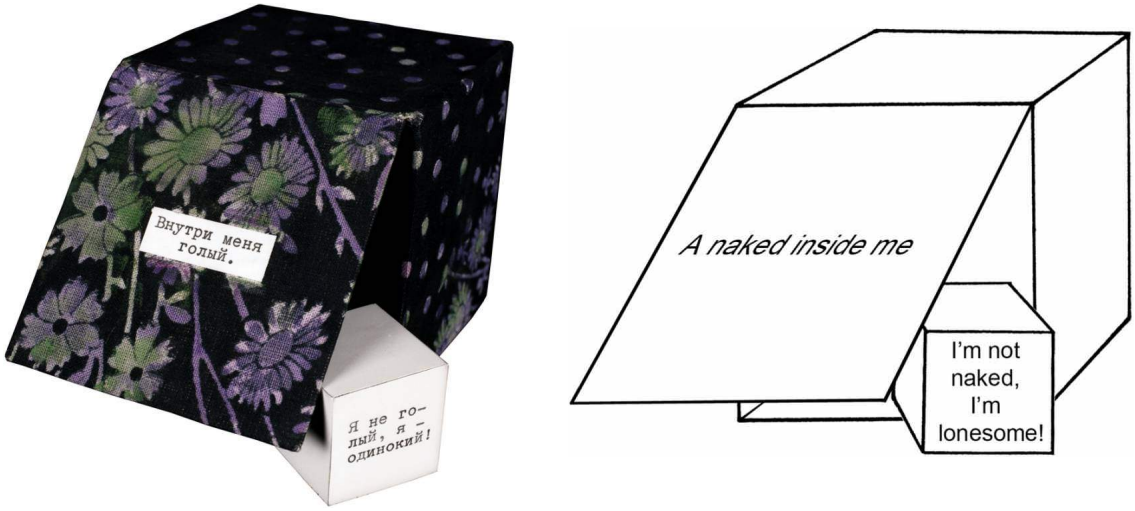
viduals can find solitude amid the crowd. They can retire into themselves at any time, creating their own inner solitude wherever they go by preserving their personal atmosphere and aura. Self-trained in their ability to endure hard knocks, they can prosper in the face of obstacles. Alienated not from reason but from emotions and instincts, such types can carry their solitude with them into the busy streets.

Many religious practices involve isolation and seclusion, facilitating better receptivity to spiritual purposes. In Balzac's view, it is hard "to belong to God and be left among

men" (*Seraphita*). Wise (and unwise) anchorites try to "fish" their own souls, going through periods of asceticism, silence, and isolation. Those who enter the state of absorbed, fascinated reverie have single-minded attention to God and do not feel lonely when they are alone. How else is one to know the aloneness of being, from which, in the words of Plotinus, "all things issue, toward which all incline, the source of life and spirit"? [40] These thoughts can be recomposed in the form of an equation:

ALL+ONE = ALONE

In ascetic practices, opening inner faculties toward divinity



R.G., *Naked*, 1974, cardboard, paper, fabric, wood, 8 cm^3

can happen only in solitude and on the condition of liberation from the burden of earthly desires, miseries, struggle, and suffering. However, the inward retreat in complete suspension of the reflective power of the surface consciousness is not limited to religious practices. Over-sensitive people need protection, which they find in their solitude, like a pupa, protected from outside life during its metamorphosing period. So, they limit their contacts, avoid undesirable effects, and guard their mental peace. Seeing the internal confusion and external disquiet of the world, its hypocrisy and blindness,

they escape into detachment, going into the desert place in the self. (In such a situation, it is imperative not to overdevelop sympathy for your own self-induced suffering.) Even in everyday life, a certain degree of introversion and seclusion restrains the mental and psychic energies from being dissipated in the world. Turning away from the *exterior* senses opens the door of perception to *interior* knowledge. One is learning in the stillness within oneself. Speaking alchemically, introversion acts as a container for transforming the psyche in its detachment and solitude, enhancing its capacity for subtle introspection.

Water Flask © 1996,
photos, metal

However, introversion can be qualitatively different, manifesting in various ways, from struggle and suffering to delight and amusement or a state of neutrality and peace, as seen in the Chinese *Wu Wei* practice of non-action or action-less action. When learned thoroughly, this practice allows one to sit mindfully in forgetfulness, free from anxiety, repelling disturbances, and retaining a sacred stillness. In this state of true peace, one flows through life easily without forcing things with expectations and plans. Those who mastered the *Wu Wei* method do nothing but achieve everything. Aside from specific practices, one can find internal pleasure in

Fire Flask © 1996,
photos, metal

one's own thoughts and activities, even delight in solitude, and have prophetic visions. Loneliness is the price of independence, but it might be a course of joy, not suffering. In such a case, the word "retreat" would be more appropriate than "withdrawal." Creating a secret center within oneself in exalted solitude, silently smiling, one does not feel lonely when one is alone.

In the process of regeneration, the divine boat of Osiris passes through the *Duat*, the underworld in ancient Egyptian mythology. The geography of *Duat* consists of various traps and challenges of primordial chaos that Osiris finally overcomes and resurrects. Placed in a horizontal position and moved like a mummy on the Nile, our image is sealed in a trance. Mythology contains many tales of people set afloat in arks, chests, or barks, incubated as magical children who are supposed to grow into heroes. Anyone who wants to control the dangerous subconscious areas of good and evil – the gra-

Ark © 1993, photos, metal

dation that appears to be built upon shifting sands – must be an individual with a sufficiently subordinated ego.

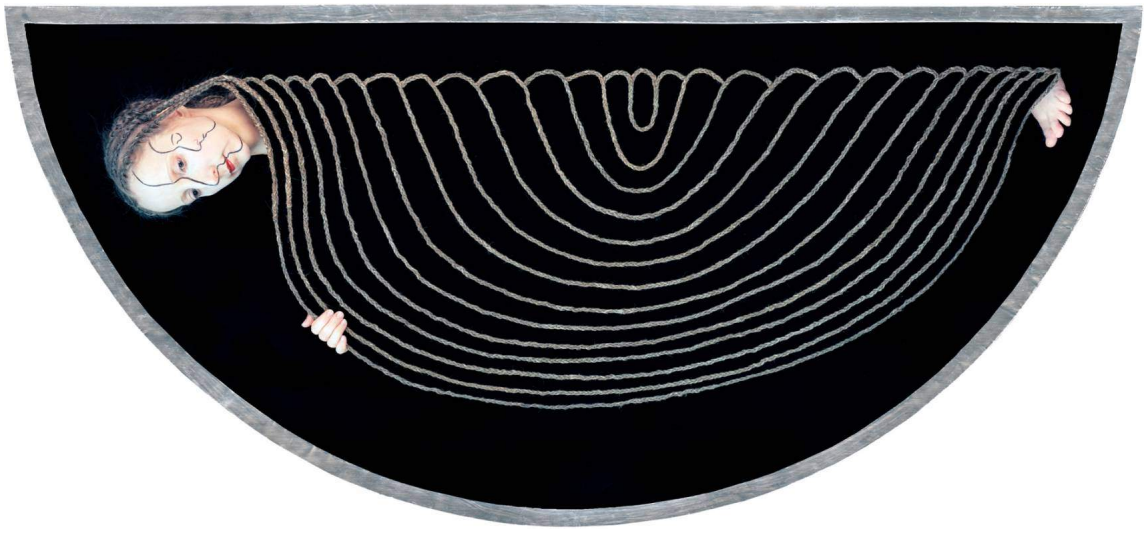
What is more, without the complete surrender of the personal ego, there can be no inflow of spirit and grace necessary to have a safe trip to the limbo, objectified in the visible world in unlucky events or created in one's own mind. Ark (*arca*, "chest," Lat.) is a temporal coffin with a hidden trea-

sure and a secret of arcana (derived from the same word). As opposed to a sarcophagus ("flesh eater") made of limestone that dissolved flesh, this is a vehicle (similar to Noah's Ark) on which a new life floats over the waters of life. The soul feeds on itself, when in its proper element in seclusion, which facilitates activating the link to the realm of the archetypes. The higher the point one reaches, the lonelier the road becomes until one finds oneself in exile in the world. The observation of Arthur Schopenhauer, rather proficient in this experience, might be of some interest:

> "I early became conscious of the difference between myself and others, but I thought first get to know a hundred, and you will find your man; – then – you will find him among a thousand; at length – he must come, if only among many thousands. Finally, I came to realize that nature is infinitely parsimonious and that I had to bear the 'solitude of kings' with dignity and patience." [41]

The person with higher degrees of spiritual integration often evokes puzzlement, suspicion, and even downright enmity. It happens without interactions and words, despite his good intentions, simply because his aura and mental and emotional

Blanket © 1996, photos, metal



fields provoke this reaction. Negative feelings from the surrounding people force him into isolation, and he avoids re-entangling in past contacts that only keep him down. Preaching truth to the world is dangerous and of no use to the unreceptive majority. Why should any sane person from this majority think it is noble to give up his own life to save the world? Humanity, for the most part, has no capacity for moral grandeur, valid reason, and righteousness. Sometimes prophetic circumstances, so deeply inhospitable, are more powerful than a most enlightened individual, so they bring his life to a logical finale, described in many sources of spiritual knowledge. As if in a familiar biblical story, Plato predicted that if one of the gods comes to the earth, he/she will be rejected and murdered. If you can't think of such highly advanced individuals kindly, don't think of them at all. Their fate is supra-individual.

Speaking about exceptional figures, we must not forget

Me-n © 1989

Lonesomeness © 1990

the objective karmic situation concerning everyone, i.e., an essential loneliness of man, as in the folk song:

> "One is one and all alone and evermore shall be so."

Not really an individual who abandons the world, but the world consists of strangers: *The Stranger* of Albert Camus is one of them, the author himself, who is featured wandering in the labyrinths of absurd existentialism. Many literary characters return to themselves through alienation: the protagonist in Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf* lives in the metropolis lonelier than an anchorite in the cave. Hesse himself, in his late years, nailed the excerpt from the writing of a fictional sage Meng Hsia (implying Hesse himself) to the door of his house:

> "...The proper course is to pass by the gate of his house as though no one lived there." [42]

The world of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez is a utopic place where everybody is doomed to fatalistic entrapment. The more the loners withdraw inside, the more they are isolated from others. "City life is millions of people being lonesome together," to quote Thoreau (*Walden*).

Metaphors of isolation could be an inner house, magical castle, or other insulating units in which solipsists put their loneliness to use for an advanced course in egocentrism. Obsessively creative individuals think it is God's impulse in them, though it might be revealed quite otherwise. There are many different points of view on personal independence: for Sri Krishnaprem, it is

> "a dream that one can never have, and even if one did, it would be hell, for it means separateness." [43]

Sri Aurobindo declared this personal freedom dubious if not

> "an illusion, a device of Nature, part of its machinery of determination, only a seeming freedom or at most a restrictive, relative, and subjective independence." [44]

In silence, solitude, and introversion, there are many traps and all kinds of neuroses, not less than in a noisy, hectic vortex of worldly life. The philosophic knowledge produces a quieting effect, while the half-knowledge of an introvert tends to disquiet and excite the inner striving. An unfavorable reflection on the inner self, which lives in some mythic space alien to the mundane, might be more frightening than a critical observation of the destructions in the material world. Besides, in separation, some become too rebellious and angry. All men want more freedom than they have. Freedom to do and be what? The fiery dragon of individuality often feeds on resentment and psychoneurosis, backed up by seemingly righteous wrath. Narcissistic introversion, loneliness, and solitude have their evils, especially when mental power deserts the loner. The mind can lapse into daydreams, experiencing blank periods, as a solitary prisoner in its dream of mental otherness. Many creative individuals had no world beyond themselves, and their talents reflected the depth of their solipsism. Take at least the suicidal confessions of

Sylvia Plath that were determined by her utter separateness:

> "As from a star, I saw, coldly and soberly, the separateness of everything. I felt the wall of my skin: I am I. That stone is a stone. My beautiful fusion with the things of this world was over." [45]

However, art made during self-imposed loneliness might become a self-healing process, which C.G. Jung repeatedly pointed out. By grasping individuation, solitude, and prayer through the ideograms of myths, art can turn into a mysterious sacred thing, offering mythical tranquility and reducing all events to their hidden meaning. The plasticity of visual language lets the mind speak through silence, which might be more potent than any explanation. Pure art shields from insanity, although there are conspicuous exceptions. Imperceptibly, solitude makes one reevaluate many values and opens an intriguing range of symbols. Their psycho-spiritual world invokes a desire to rise above the limitations of matter. Reading the subtext into the language of visual art, one can trace the patterns of the evolution of the spiritual capacity for consolation and restoration to life. However, there are always high ideas that are impossible to convey either by images and words or by inner silence.

Windy Scroll © 2008,
photo, metal

5: UNFOLDING

Tangled with artwork bent on the idea of transfiguration, we allowed ourselves to be influenced by the seccession of mysterious images packed in unpredictable forms that can surprise even their creators. As if our eyes got a new vision of things around us, they seemed to acquire unusual plasticity, looking smoothed, bent, stretched, or anamorphic. So, we adjusted our art forms to the fluid totality of this vision. In the *Unfolding* series, individual body parts were inserted into flat metal constructions, forming composite body "patterns" with illusory properties. This is how resilience and elasticity began to "circulate" in our arbitrary images encased in metal.

Second Sight © 1993,
photos, metal

To begin with, we suggest looking at the work *Second Sight,* for this is not what you see. The plasticity of silence is meant to provide an environment for an alternative vision. In the *Second Sight,* the "other" eyes are wide open, drawn on the half-closed lids of the half-asleep figure, half-wrapped with the wave of hair – all facilitate the atmosphere of aware-

ness in some obscure way, pending on intuition. The figure wrapped in golden fleece appears to be sleeping; in fact, her real eyes are slightly open, while her fake eyes are painted on her drooping eyelids. They are wide open, but as soon as the real eyes open, the fake eyes blink and close. When the ordinary, everyday view of things becomes passive, the second intuitive vision is activated, which can be characterized, to some extent, as *participation mystique.*

The *Unfolding Series* shows a slight tint of situational irony between apparent and hidden meanings. To decode its polarity, we should be careful not to slay *unfolding* hypotheses by *folded* flat facts. Maybe intuition is a memory of the verity. Mind and art can only hint at it but not name it; hence, transformative power does not evaporate. The creative filament is a border between the plasticity of shapes and intuitive ideas, perhaps even further, the medium between astral dreams and the solid matter of mundane life. They reflect each other but

In the displacement of different layers of reality and sleep, there is also a kind of reality, albeit of an astral nature. At the primary level, there is a “well” of memory from which dream interpretations are drawn; in a more complex subordination, it is in this layer that the embryo of a complex psyche is formed. Switching from reality to the astral field is like switching thinking from one speed to another, which can lead to dramatic changes in life. We are born blind by nature, meaning we do not really know the essence that is invisible to the eyes. The eyesight and insight are far too different. However, our mental vision blurs this transition so that there is no knowing where reality ends and the dream begins, at least in art. It can be assumed that there is an astral plane (*akasha,* Skrt.) on which everything that happens on the material plane is reflected and caught in an invisible web. In these *akashic* records, not only images are preserved, but also smell and color; in a word, life itself is stored in an inviolable form in the archives of the Universe, to which we do not yet have access.

Milky Way © 1993,
photos, metal

Nevertheless, it has been established that only to the crude eye do bodies appear dense, but in fact, they are a cluster of moving cells, each equipped with a device through which the cell breathes and perceives aromas, colors, and vibrations. The flexibility, resilience, and fluidity of our images allude to the idea that the spirit can pass right through and beyond the body, through that mortal thing of bitter matter to which, according to Plato, "we are bound like an oyster to its shell" (*Phaedrus,* 250 c). On the other hand, we can flip the meaning over, suggesting that the soul secretes its body as a snail secretes its shell. Many reputable followers of the *Mayavada* doctrine *(maya*, "illusion," *vada*, "teaching," Skrt.), which do not allow validity to the external world, only redoubled our doubts that all things obey a rigid law. Plasticity of mind increases with the growth of its self-understand-

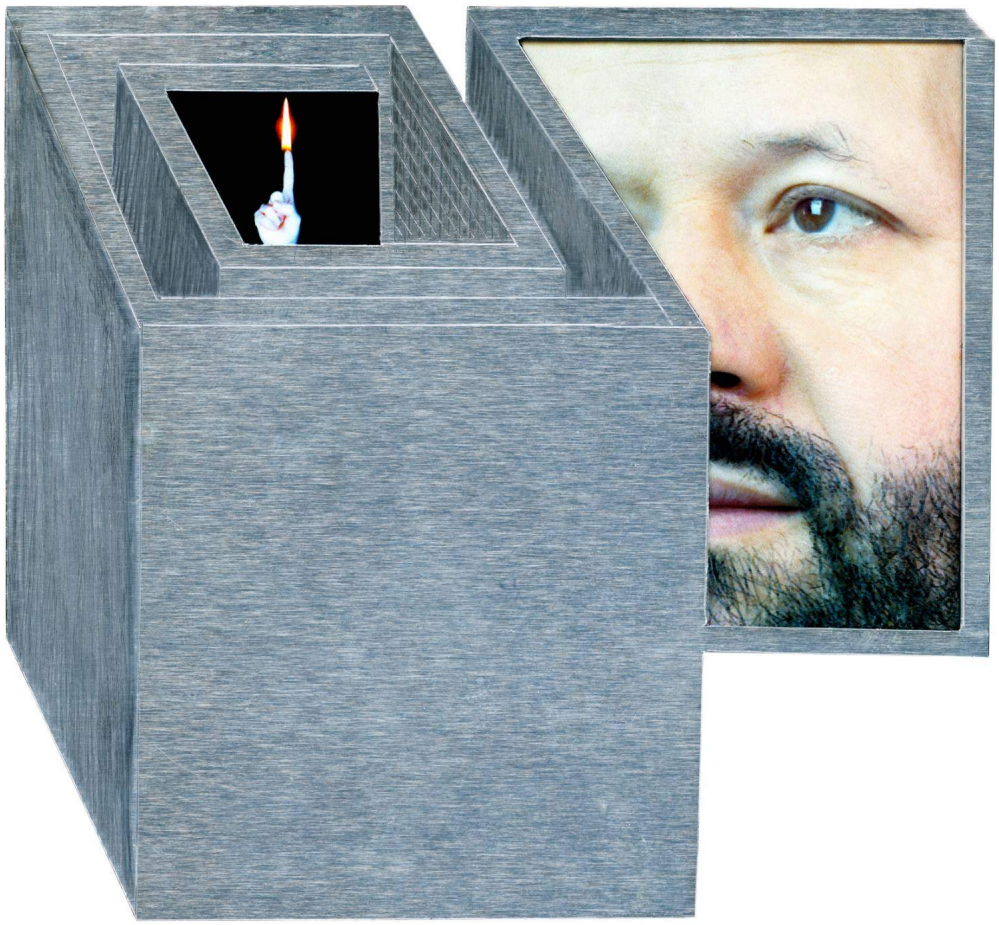
ing, which Sri Krishnaprem managed to convey in the detached calm of his mindful voice:

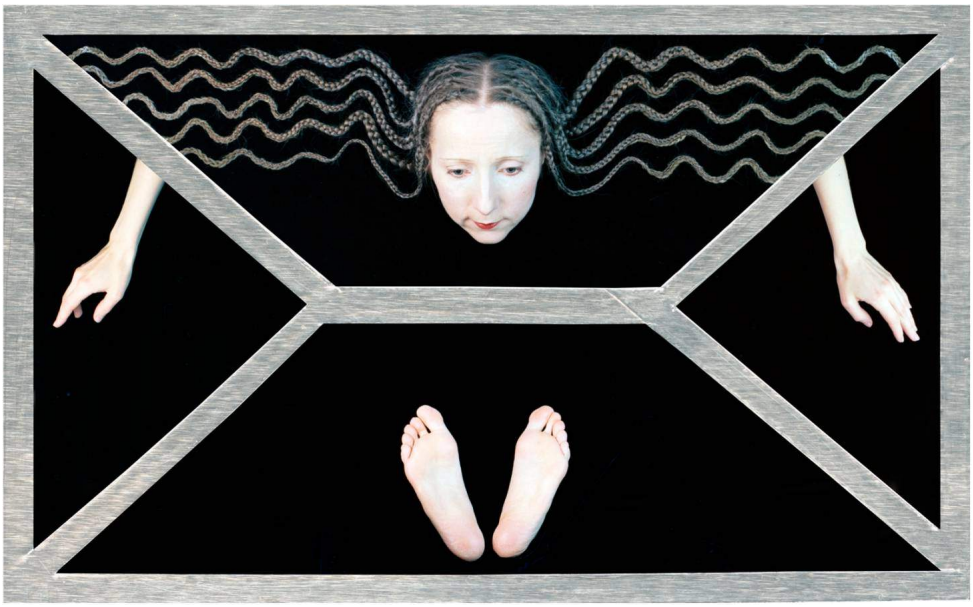
> "The whole world is artificial, and its artificer is the mind. Nowhere in all the world is there anything solid and real. We tread on thought, our bodies are made of thought, the whole world is but thought... The only reality is all this ever-changing flux of shadows... The floor on which you are sitting is not a solid thing at all but a mere phantom floating in the sea of consciousness." [46]

Staircase © 1992, photo, pencil, brushed aluminum

His line of reasoning can be continued with simple medical facts: the pain of a wounded leg has its seat in the brain, which governs the speed of movement, its fluidity, and many other things. In short, the mind controls the body and its perspective on life. And if so, is it possible to wear our bodies on our souls the way we wear clothes? We can disembody ourselves mentally by imagination, which doesn't tally with our ordinary idea of reality. Our works are not about things but about life force as a supreme formation of dynamic impulses. They are like frozen music if you like. Hence, the *Unfolding Series* is based not on solid matter but on the plasticity of

Fuse © 2008, photos, brushed metal





Levitation © 1994,
photos, metal

shapes capturing the fluidity of the world. Albert Einstein reportedly said, "Everything in life is vibration," while one of his most famous assertions is directly relevant to our unfolding images:

> "We are slowed down sound and light waves, a walking bundle of frequencies tuned into the cosmos. We are souls dressed up in sacred biochemical garments, and our bodies are the instruments through which our souls play their music." [47]

We weave the bodies from hair as if they are formed from metaphysical bones, subtle and sublime. Perceiving the life force not in gross flesh but in spirit, we present it like coherently oscillating waves with a flowing movement. The very life of the psyche goes through affirmations and negations of the world's validity, replacing each other like waves. Even if it looks like an alluring mythological world of spectacular illusion, the fact that it is an illusion is not a reason for denying its meaning. Life renews itself by its own motion,

helping to cope with the regressive tendencies of the external world wherein nothing is enduring.

The social world makes rigid rules, but the manifestation of reality is very plastic and many-sided. Its realization may come through the gradual development of an organically creative process, not a well-reasoned classification, for in art, the more you classify, the more you can doubt the classification. Voicing our own thoughts visually, we expressed the concept of progressive elevation in the image *Toward*, an

Toward © 1993, photos, metal

allegory that shows how energy rises up toward the state of heightened awareness. Earth seems to recede from the unfolding figure passing by, whispering and on tip-toe as if carried by the psyche's secret light waves. The illusory body weighs nothing and is almost ready to fly up. The naked face fills the upper picture; its contours are seemingly made of soft clay. With a step upward, life energy manifests as a mode of consciousness stamped upon the face, the face with which one can possibly feel at home, protected by the white

Sun Totem © 1995,
photo, metal, pencil

Golden Fleece © 1993,
photos, metal

sunbeams that ray over the image. The vital energy can be as ardent and natural as sunlight on the human face, water surface, or a butterfly's wings.

The sun is a symbol of the world's intelligence: its astral light is brilliant, rational, intense, and austere. It can evoke a sense of exaltation in those seeking a timeless, creative truth, sincerity, and goodness, should they have a sound intellect, an honest heart, or are mad in a saintly way. There are many delusions, but the truth is one, though having too many definitions. Therefore, all human knowledge of the truth is only its approximation, at best pointing toward it. Some advanced individuals can intuitively reach its sacred gate, pass through it, and become such a gate for others longing for that experience. Many mystics perceived themselves as rays of the divine sun; some of them believed in the accessibility of God,

while others had doubts. The images *Toward* or *Sun Totem* are not about religious devotees who are "up to the eyebrow" in God, though something similar in its secular form is in its air. Our conceptually inclined nature always urged us along the path of intuition, uplifting, liberating, and transcendent.

The psyche spirals outward, inward, upward, and downward, trying to reconcile with the mystery of life so thata new and different equilibrium could result. According

Eve with the Apple © 1994,
photos, metal, pencil

to Plotinus:

> "Emanation of creation from the Godhead down lasts till it reaches matter, then the evolutionary process begins back." [48]

Turning everything into a personal diagram, artists who are affected by world processes rise and fall together with them, leaving visual evidence of their regressive progressions. From the standpoint of ordinary, day-to-day activity, that is how their life is arranged – upside down. Every slightest effort to awaken the unconscious responds with its equally forceful resistance. What would you have done if you could see the bottom of your soul? The image *Diver* may be an attempt to answer it. When you throw yourself into a projected abyss, you can experience an illusion of flight with emptiness enveloping you like ether. Our transitory self would not think during its leap of what could happen at the end, which foretaste and aftertaste are immanent parts of the human lot. Put in biblical context, some fall out of heaven into material life slowly like a feather, while others are fast as lightning. By the sole heat of libido, one learns not to resist and, letting oneself fall, tries to draw from the power of protection against a possible crash.

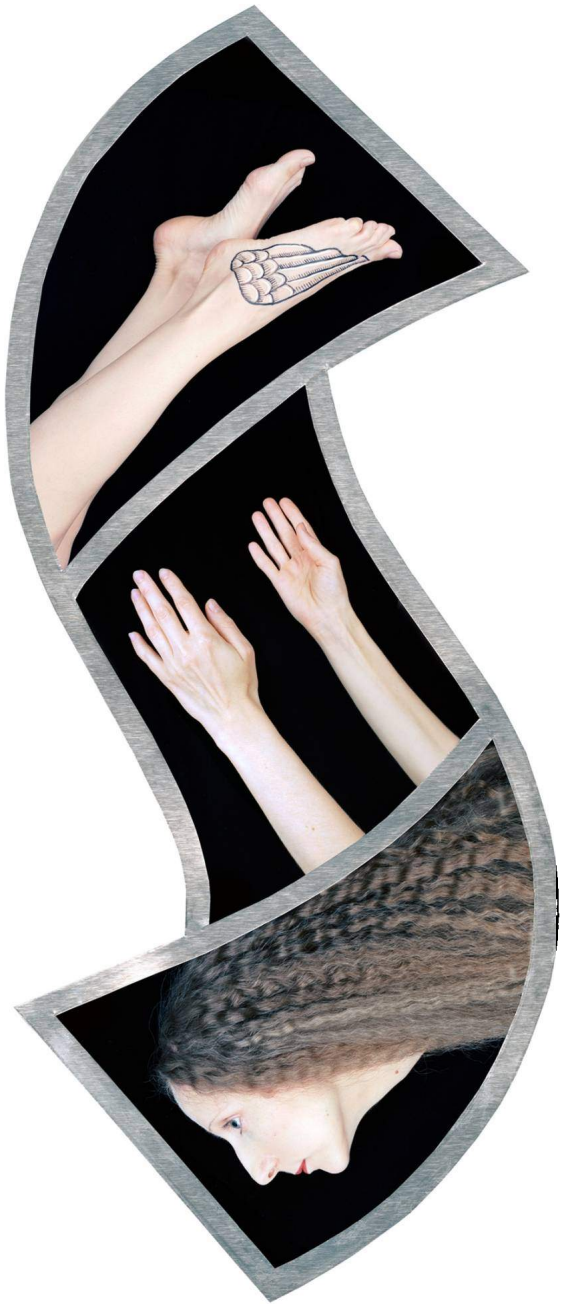
le
gra *VITA* *tion*

Slants on the curvature of our *Diver* show only the limbs; the real body is weightless and homeless, wiped off the unfolding image. The diver exhibits the skill to moderate advantage: a trifle dizzy but as physically fit as a gymnast, mentally alert and free of despondency. This fit of art, with airy lightness, conceals the spirit of adventure with some deeper meaning. When all that really matters is light and airy liberty, if only momentarily, one can feel free from earth and, clinging to nothing, find oneself translated in the spirit, carrying over the inspiration of this world into the next. If you dive into your innermost self, you may venture outside the border of this life. Before our minds begin unreeling such a picture, certain questions arise by themselves. Can we find a mode of manifestation not subject to mortal condition so we

can be carried beyond molecular dissolution?

Imagine the gravity force of the Earth on your feet. Not under normal earth-bound conditions, but tentatively free, when feelings are abstracted from their usual circumstances

Diver © 1993,
photos, metal



and the daily world of universal conflicts. The cartography of the subtler levels of reality can be divided into two main directions: toward above (the spiritualization of the Earth) and toward below (the "earthing" of the spirit). These directions may be subjected to the law of the union of opposites, allowing some harmonization and the birth of new possibilities. Our *Unfolding Map* seems to reach for both opposites. As its conceptual reality unfolds, we see no usual coordinates of our lived-in "universe" with its socio-political cosmology and corporate connections. Only barefoot earth. As

Bird and Fish © 1993,
photos, metal

if a winding road made from hair or an unwrapped scroll, this figure stretches between top and bottom, connecting above with below, heaven with earth – both coexist in one person. We may wonder what the poet Giuseppe Ungaretti meant by saying, "What are you doing, Earth, in heaven?" [49]

Unfolding Map © 1993, photos, metal

The path to harmoniously connect these two coordinates is the same for everyone, although all individual maps differ. Almost every faith and every philosophical school offers its own maps. Artists and poets can fill the place of metaphysical needs without too much thought, not giving definite answers to lofty, inexorable questions. The anthropomorphic *Divine Comedy* is also a map, embodying a purgatorial metropolis in the shape of Manhattan, on which the spectator can move two soft cubes bearing the illustrious names: "Dante" is the green cube, and "Virgil" (already being a shadow) is grey. This one-man-city links the two extreme frequencies of heavenly fantasies and hellish phantasms. The green "Central Park" is comfortably located in the abdomen of that figure. The world is dressed up in the desires of the flesh - Manhattan especially.

Both in theory and in practice, opposites gravitate toward each other: the top becomes more or less understandable only in the context of the bottom, the right needs the left, black needs white, and vice versa. Therefore, in drawing up our map, covering the figure from head to toe, the higher and lower are parts of one spiral connecting the abstract and concrete worlds. But finding the point of equilibrium between heaven and earth is as tricky as nailing a shadow to the ground. Sometimes, pictorial thinking can exhibit antithetical balance and even dialectics (of a kind).

Dialectics aside, let's put both our feet on the ground. The Earth left a visible footprint on this *Unfolding Map.* The pedosphere is the Earth's outermost layer, composed of soil subjected to various formation processes. It is the ground layer we stand and walk on, trample and stamp, gravitate and rely on. In technical usage, "gravitation" is the general property of mutual attraction between material bodies with a tendency to accelerate toward one another.

Meanwhile, "gravity" is specifically the attractive force of the Earth that causes objects with mass and weight to fall to the ground when dropped. The earth also moves toward the object but only by an infinitesimal amount. Beyond this school-level information necessary for the conceptual background, there is hands-on (in our case, feet-on) experience depicted in the *Unfolding Map.* The wrapped-in-hair figure lands on earth, mapped on the bare soles of the feet. You can call it a descent into the depth of life, grounding yourself to

the earth and dowsing in its frenzies, or, speaking metaphysically, falling into matter. This prompts further reflections: what on *earth* were you thinking? What on *earth* has man been up to? Is it worthwhile to devote oneself only to the

R. G., Divine Comedy, 1984, wood, canvas, foam, wires, acrylic, 208 x 81 x 13 cm

profitable vices of the material world in a relatively short time of union of spirit and body? “Are you so foolish? Having begun with the spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?” wonders St. Paul (Gal. 3:3). Standing amid the burial ground called the Earth, with its fragments of an extinct past and ruins composed of other ruins, one can feel why our terrestrial existence might be seen as a burden or even a confinement. Aggravating further this idea, the apocryphal *Apocalypse of Adam* suggests to become a passer-by:

> “For the whole creation that came from the dead earth will be under the authority of death.” [50]

Channel © 1997

Mythology and religion supply various explanations of how the soul has sunk into the profound depths and darkness of material nature. The first example that comes to mind is the Ancient Greek goddess Persephone: she descends into Hades as the soul descends into the obscurity of the body and the limitation of matter. Similarly, Edgar Cayce, known as the sleeping prophet, explained the fall of the highly civilized Atlanteans:

> "They had pushed themselves into matter for self-gratification only and lost self-control and became as 'things'" [51]

On the Wheels © 1997

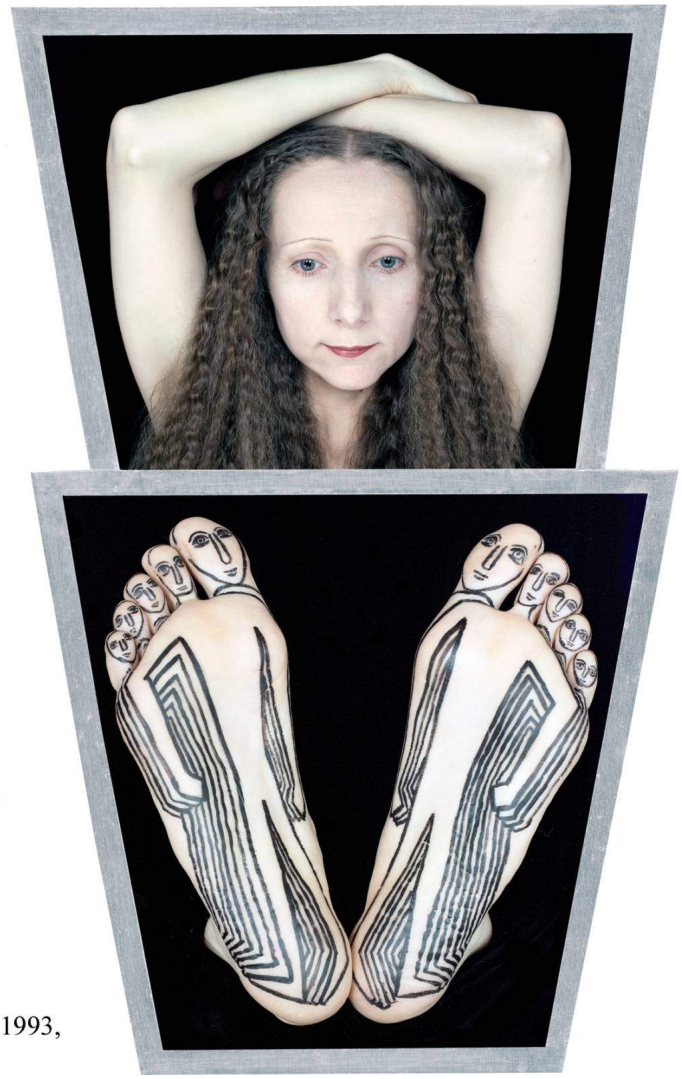
Preferring temporal things to eternal is a movement of the flesh, impelled downwards. Watery and terrestrial elements, which tend earthwards, overwhelm the body and weigh it down. To preach spiritual ideas in the material world, one must be free and detached from that world and be able to break the power of earthly reason. But it is hard to stay in a spiritual state long, defying the earth's pull.

Viewed from another perspective, the earth element represents the condensation in which the other three elements (air, fire, and water) are stabilized and encased in concrete forms. Based on the reproductive powers of the Earth, they help human beings realize their destinies here on *terra firma.* We ought not to rejoice in our control over our fate, for believing that life can be molded to our advantage might be somewhat illusory. What if it does not? Even though terrestrial bodies are corruptible, they are necessary as abodes and as instruments or life's energies; therefore, The *Gospel of Philip* warns us:

> "Fear not the flesh nor love it.
> If you fear it, it will gain mastery over you.
> If you love it, it will swallow and paralyze you." [52]

The *Unfolding Map* depicts the earthly senses of the feet, so to speak, which footprints belong to the domain of nature. The Earth is a groundwork of man's being, a heavenly earthling, earthborn and earthbound. "The son of heaven by the body of the earth" *(Rig-Veda* III. 25.1) is a natural bridge between up and down. In the *Unfolding Map,* a seemingly bodiless figure is clothed in hair from face to feet. Yet, in some upside-down manner, the land contours depicted on the human feet enlarged out of proportion occupy the central place of the composition. It is as if a spectator is somewhat positioned underneath, with vision reduced to the scale of an ant. The big feet dominate the landscape. The body remains sublimely out of touch; as usual, its unexplained absenteeism is filled up by the hair, the repository of the life force, the hair of a woman not fully in this world. Slants and curvature of the image, in addition to the plastic form molded out of hair, point not at the real world all around but at some subliminal world within.

Now, a few words about the other features of this work.



Feet Cradle ©1993,
photos, metal

Is it necessary to make a reservation that our feet walk on the earth according to the biological laws of necessity and that the roots of world knowledge rest on direct experience in the physical body? Therefore, the spiral of the figure descends from top to bottom and "feet forward." How often must a person adapt his thinking and feelings according to the zigzags of gross reality with its *a priori* laws of gravity and inertia of fall?

Life is filled with challenges. "He who has a hundred

miles to walk should reckon ninety as half the journey," says a Japanese proverb. Having received the experience of decline and momentum, the proficient value seeker may return to the normal mode of material existence, bringing within the knowledge of another world. The Taoists felt they only "borrow" the physical body to cultivate "the body beyond the body."

We maintained two approaches to the *Unfolding Map*: the earth is presented as a force drawing us downwards and as a firmament on which we stand. Despite the precept that what is given to the body is taken from the spirit, the body itself is the divinely appointed residence of the soul during its life on earth. Earth is our footing and, according to the Vedas, also the symbol of our flesh, in which the spirit incarnates. The corporeal form is added to the spirit according to its essence, not vice versa. In short, the spirit is clothed in flesh, of which Albert Einstein wrote:

> "Those who would preserve the spirit must also look after the body to which it is attached." [53]

The feet must be sure of their ground if one is to have a complete self-expression in matter, where *terra nostra* is life itself and a symbol of carnal reason. The grammar of gravity contributes to making people feel relatively at ease and ready to meet the world. This brings us to the concept of the earth chakra *Muladhara,* which deals with all that is solid: within us and without in the physical world around us. To awaken *kundalini,* one must first experience the obscure side of *Muladhara* at the base of the spine, the root of all things, the coarse realm of matter. The Earth is a stone vault, a dense matrix, which mystery is connected with the plane of matter (from *mater,* Lat.). In Goethe's understanding, it is the realm of mothers, the source and the matrix of all lives, including the imagined ones. To reach the mothers' realm, one must delve mentally into the geological depths with its subterranean activity. G.R.S. Mead rendered this idea closely enough:

> "Before he can burst through upwards, he must break through downwards. Man is above, yet is he below; man if free, yet is he bound." [54]

The subterranean depth can be analyzed on the level of the subconscious. When the subjective world unfolds, its boundless multitudes of thoughts can be observed from the objective sphere. That is what we tried to show in the image

Mirror © 1994,
photos, metal

Mirror, which demonstrates how sphericity, optical elasticity, specularity, and reflectivity were instrumental in the visual version of this idea. The flat circle of our *Mirror* is bent like rubber, symbolizing the mental overflow flaw. The reflections are on both sides of the looking glass as if the faces were pasted on the underside of the mind. The visualized

second thoughts rise to the surface as a whisper on the silvery lining of the mirror. Halftone down in the unconsciousness with disrupted connectivity in the brain, they are non-existent, an absence within an absence. Halftone up in the subconscious, they proceed without man's awareness and evaporate at the first mention of thinking. Suppose these

Manyness © 1990

face-shaped thoughts are only there if one was there to see them in the phantasmal looking glass.

Our ordinary minds are distorted bits of mirrors in which the central ideas become broken up into blurred and grotesque reflections. The cause of these thoughts, interwoven and knotted together in a thousand ways, and also the cause of their cause, proliferating further, goes endlessly nowhere. Only a thorough self-examination can prevent or at least slow

down this quasi-continuous operation. Mirrors are often not a means of self-knowledge but a means of self-deception. Self-examining all your shadows reflected in the folded and unfolded looking glass, you may see not only yourself but also somebody else. To give this turn of thought an allegoric twist, even a corpse might contemplate you from the depth of

Secret © 1990

the spectral reflection. If a baby can recognize itself in a mirror by 12 months, it takes the mature individuals many years to identify their inner look, polish the mirror of their mind, and become lucidly honest in their self-reflection. However, there may be other rather unexpected scenarios when a would-be self-analytic can wake up in his mirror dream in real life. Nobody knows exactly what we look like until we see ourselves in the mirror. And what about the inner

substance, thoughts, and soul? What do they look like? What does the world of ideas look like?

We experimented with mirrors in everyday life, searching for aesthetic formulae to express their theoretical, albeit somewhat surreal, meaning. Implying multiple reflections and reversed symmetry within the looking-glass universe, we made the flat surface of the image *Test* look multidimensional, extending to somewhat absurd parameters. Within the circular domain of scattering angles, the reflections are not actually real but real in an intuitive way. The mind can use its mirror-like awareness and consume all visual information in the carousel of images, seemingly creating a multi-channeled gateway to the world between worlds. Over the years, we realize with a piercing acuteness that mirrors reflect a person not as one imagines oneself but as one has become.

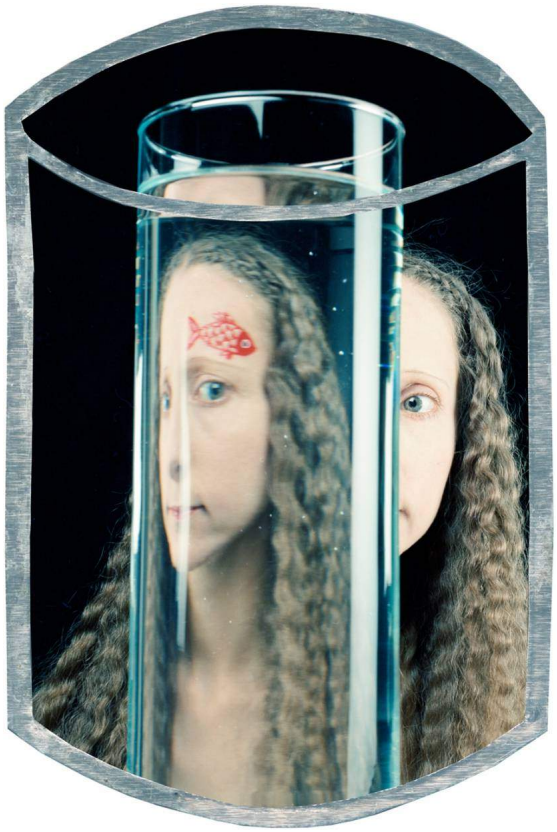
Clean water reflects almost like a mirror but deforms the images, like in our *Aquarium.* A fish, drawn on the forehead, swims in its mirrored form in *aqua nostra,* the universal

Test © 1995

solvent in alchemical double vessels. The reflections in the water, their mysterious complexities, and illusions were the reason for the emergence of many legends. The image in a glass jar is somewhat crooked and far from admiring its own reflection – it is not Narcissus fishing in this *Aquarium.* The first impression is that everything is out of focus, and the vagueness causes a slight dizziness. The forehead seems to recede when everything floats and fluctuates before the eyes, vaguely suggesting that the mind is unceasingly swimming in its own substance, like a fish in the water.

Many allegories intersected in our artwork in quite different genres. Some drawings featuring water reflections in Valeriy's book *Pronouncements* are determinedly nonsensical, perhaps understandable without words. Despite his indulgence in creating somewhat hazardous fantasies, his visual pronouncements depict strange phenomena as bare as

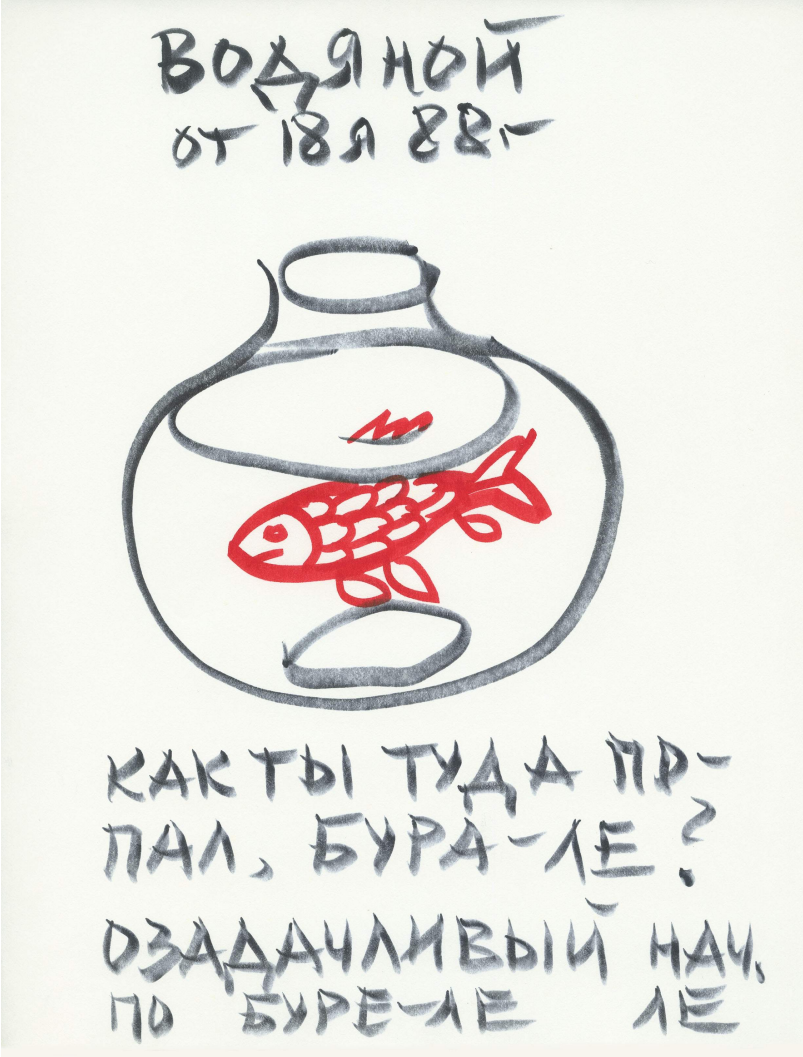
Aquarium © 1993,
photo, metal



possible in a few concise words. (We must clarify before translating two pages from *Pronouncements*: Búra-Le is his wife Rimma, born in Pisces.)

Folding and unfolding processes with mysterious reflections can be useful for achieving mental and emotional insight, while there are those who find their epiphany in mathematical secrets in the world of numbers – a subject of our next chapter.

V.G., *The Dish Pronouncement* of March 15, 88. Carafed Búra-Le. Chief of Búra-Le."



V.G., *The Water Pronouncement* of Jan. 18, 88. How did you get there, Búra-Le? Puzzled chief of Búra-Le."

6: THE TETRACTYS

As artists, we have long tried to understand the meaning of numbers and the secrets they contain, a human pursuit that dates back thousands of years. Whether a number is interpreted subjectively or objectively, to distinguish between its inner and outer meanings, it is unnecessary to value one above the other. They are complementary and in equilibrium.

The Tetractys © 1989/2010,
photo, metal, 66 x 50 x 11 cm

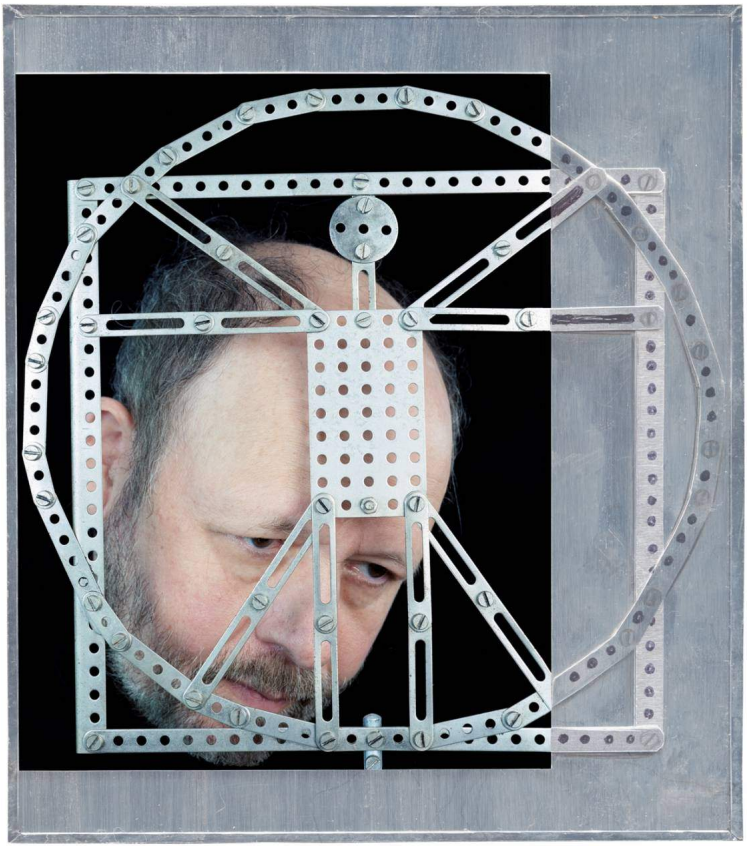
The windowed object *Tetractys* suggests an unusual form of opening – the numerological one. Depicting the four-part pattern from one to ten, the tetractys (from *tetras*, "four" in Greek) is a symbolic paradigm of creation:

the TEN-ET
of antiquity resting on its
LA-TEN-T PO-TEN-TIAL

The crowning ten is a turning point of all counting, returning to the completeness and unity of one but on a higher octave. The tetractys was revered by the cultivated Hellenes no less than the icons of Orthodox Christians or the mandalas of Buddhists. In the minds of the Pythagoreans, whose neophytes took their oath upon the tetractys, it meant a reconciliation of the notions of unity and diversity. All Pythagoreans have held it in the highest esteem, as evidenced by the formula of their oath:

> "I swear by the one who has bestowed the tetractys to the coming generation, source of eternal nature, into our souls." [55]

At the intersection of mathematical aesthetics and the artistic genre of photography, abstract ideas move closer to the psychological background. The human element imparts a familiar, viable quality to intellectual mathematical ideas, which in themselves possess supreme austere beauty that talks mainly to the mind and does not descend to the level of feelings. Perhaps they need to have a "face" to be perceptible. In our photographic version, we blew up the tetractys on the nose so that it looked like a building block or human megalith, implying both the micro and macro connotations. Validity of the tetractys is not only in the abstract veracity; to a certain degree, it represents a digital "drama" of creation that includes all psychological factors of life, both the destiny of humanity and a single individual. In our *Tetractys*, the triangular arithmetic form fits freely into the prism of the nose, connecting the most general factors of life with the human persona. *Homo sapiens* is the mirror of the universe: we are surrounded by the same electromagnetic fields (ruled by the same deities); in us, the macrocosm of existence intersects



Leonardo's Man © 2005, photo, metal

with the microcosm of personality. Everything important can be summed up through the human essence, which was repeatedly attempted to be proven by meta-geometric means long before the Vitruvian Man of Leonardo da Vinci. A temple in a man and a man in a temple is an equation between the Egyptian temple of Luxor and a figure of a man; they are in the perfect ratio.[56]

In the Pythagorean system, the tetractys was depicted arbitrarily with dots or nodes, leaving the possibility for variations in the arrangement of numbers. After studying this sacred decimal figure in the Pythagorean annals and Orphic mythology, many of our ideas, born through artistic images, went beyond the allowable framework. Here, in the discourse about art, it makes sense to briefly summarize the results

obtained, reflected in our artwork in various ways. In the structure of the tetractys, the countdown begins with one and ends with one, but in a different "octave" or on a different plane. The monad is the turning point of calculus: when rising up the "mountain" of the tetractys, the unit is rounded off by zero (10), acquiring its completeness. The triangular composition of the tetractys can be compared to a hierarchy of deities; each emanates a specific force of varying intensity, creating its unique environment. Together, they form a harmonious formation; when completed, it develops into a new similar formation of the next order. The tetractys can be diffused into infinity, and infinity can be contracted into a point. The sum of its lower row is also 10 (the unit rounded

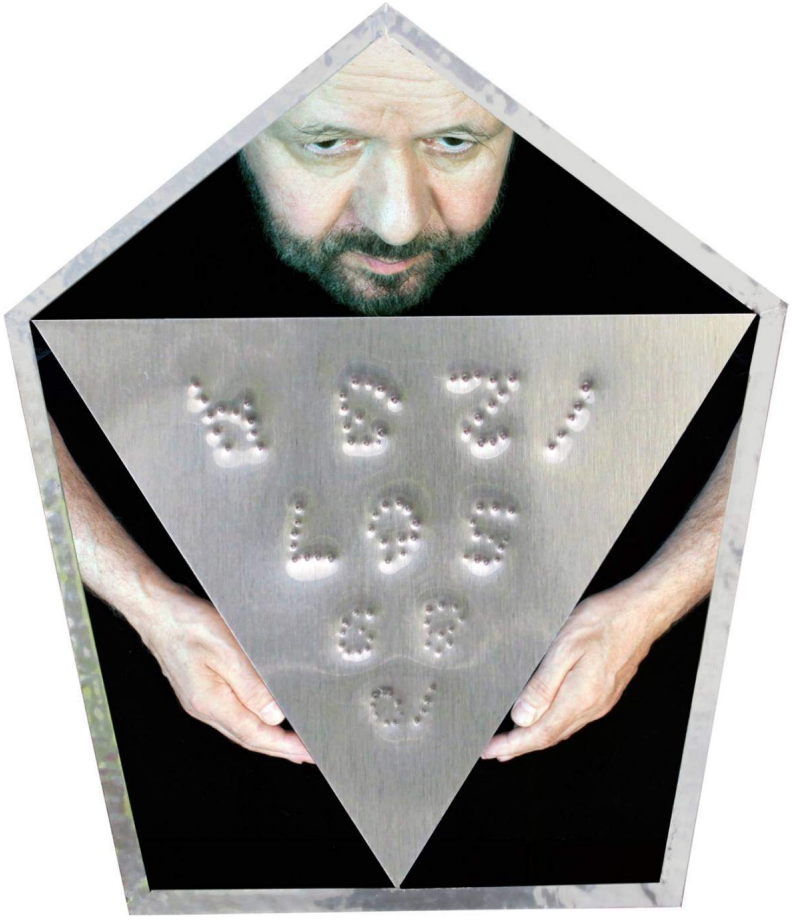
One © 1990, photos, metal

off by zero), completed in its latent potency of the decimal system: 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 10. Let us briefly consider both directions of ascent and descent. Behind the symbolism of each number, there is a dual meaning, repeated later in the Kabbalistic Tree of Life or *Sefirot,* wherein each *sefira* or node, both an angel and his direct opposite dwell together: if the first leads the soul up, the second leads it down.

10	1
8 9	2 3
5 6 7	4 5 6
1 2 3 4	7 8 9 10

Descending along the tetractys is like going down a mountain; in other words, the unitive life turns into multiplicity in the reverse order of the tetractys from 1 to 10. The sequence of numbers in the inverted tetractys can be contin-

Pascal's Triangle © 1990

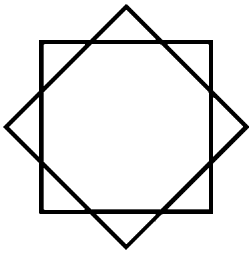


Inverted Tetractys © 2008, photo, metal

ued from the top 1 to the bottom infinity in the form of a growing triangle or unlimited paradigm, similar to *Pascal's Triangle.* During the descent, each zone becomes denser and heavier; the mental overlaps with the emotional, which gradually reduces to a direct instinct aimed only at survival in a rough physical life. The inverted tetractys scheme is also applicable to the infernal hierarchy. The invisible hierarchy of the tetractys can be traced in the structure of any organization, relatively speaking, from a boss to a crowd of low-paid employees or from a president to a large population of the country. However reverentially the tetractys might be treated, it always keeps the link flexible between the sacred and the profane. Talking of the latter, on the popular level of mass

culture, certain patterns of this harmonious arrangement often appear to be reflected in a distorted view, veiled with layers of encryption or meaningless definitions.

Let's try to explain the duality, or rather polyvalence, of numerological meanings through the number 8, which geometrically represents an eight-pointed star made up of two squares.



Traditionally, 8 is associated with stabilization in matter, wealth, and prosperity, which is why the Chinese like to call their restaurants and other establishments "888." One of our friends has such a group of eights in his dates of birth, calculated numerologically. And in fact, he is very successful financially, perhaps not without the influence of his exceptional penchant for conformity; however, this lucky combination in no way protected him from lapses into deep depression.) In a higher octave, the number 8 symbolizes not material realization but a refined understanding of how matter and consciousness interweave, while the person possessing this wisdom can be as poor as a church mouse or, should we say, as a solitary yogi.

The tetractys numbers signal various psychological traps, both stimulating and degrading. For example, when genuine faith awakens, its shadow always appears somewhere nearby (superstition, disbelief, hypocrisy), which is embodied in people or events in seemingly random situations. The correct understanding of digital concepts, events, and human characters depends on the degree of openness of the centers (or chakras) of the entire nervous system. The higher its psycho-dynamic conductivity, the more likely a positive outcome.

Because of the law of gravity, ascent and return to the original source are much more difficult than descent. Everything is like on an ordinary mountain, from where one can slide down in a group avalanche. Ascending the tetractys,

everyone experiences not only obstacles but also gravity, physical and psychic. You can spend your entire life (and more than one, or even posthumously, like Sisyphus) raising the philosopher's stone of consciousness to this magic mountain, and it will roll back again and again. Naturally, everyone understands both theory and practice according to their karmic capabilities and the degree of development as a whole. In general, few people are interested in spiritual growth, and the knowledge of such is not designed for a casual glance. It becomes understandable only after a certain degree of purification from the excess of social residue and matter in general. Geneticists now estimate that approximately

Steps © 1998, photos, metal

20 percent of the world's population experiences increased blood flow to the brain's right hemisphere, which indicates inner focus and higher levels of intuitive perception. We'd like to believe in mankind's ability, but this percentage seems to be exaggerated.

Mystics described different stages of ups and downs, replacing each other like waves and turning all transitional processes into a personal drama. Passing different degrees of integration, their consciousness was supposed to absorb transcendent knowledge gradually. Overcoming the world of phenomena, one can connect to higher dimensions where truth and spiritual beauty prevail, while in lower dimensions, they are distorted. The movement of the pilgrim's psyche on the mountain of the tetractys is accompanied by the awakening of one archetypal aspect after another, *ad infinitum.* Therefore, for the Pythagoreans, the tetractys was not a theory but a whole mystery expressing a way of "navigating"

Pythagorean Theorem © 1989

Gerlovina, Bergash, Gerlovin, *The Tetractys* © 1987

in this life and beyond it.

The subliminal "I" (the self, soul, me, ego) radiates the principles of its own origin, corresponding to the numeral for one (1) in the tetractys. This paradigm shows the trajectory of this "I" as it immerses itself in the matter and later climbs back up the same numbered "stairs." All according to a dialectic of an invisible but living dimension. The entire picture of life, both from Genesis to Apocalypse, can be conveyed in many ways, including the language of numbers and metaphorical art, to the intersection of which our numerological works belong. A subjective sense is inextricable from an objective sense, i.e., the digital "drama" of creation is repeated not only in the soul but also in the human body and its fate. The consciousness of each individual is woven into the general process of existence of all humanity. In the code of the numerological structure of the tetractys, one can trace the connections and transitions between the absolute and the

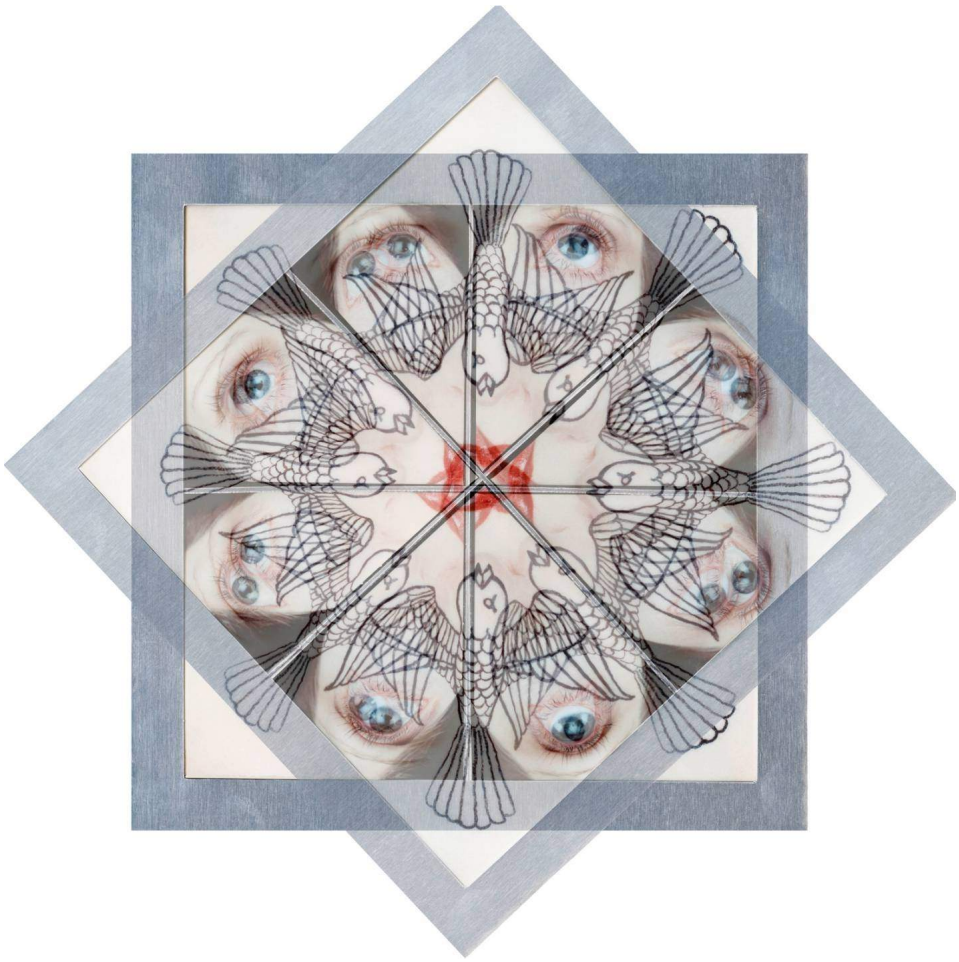
relative, the projection of the bridge between eternity and finitude, immortality and death, the sacred and the profane, harmonious unity and chaotic multiplicity. And the human soul is an adapter between all these vibrations, concords, and discords.

From the point of view of psychological introspection, numbers indicate phases of awareness, material experience, neurological processes, and much more. Digital rationalization of subconscious fluids cannot be formulaic; the creative factor plays no less a role in their interpretation than in art. The position of the numbers themselves is neutral, but the direction of movement shows their application principles. The tetractys is a kind of staircase, and like any staircase, you can go up and down it.

What goes up must come down,
down up

As is known, the initiation methods, both upward (sublimation from matter) and downward (falling into matter with all the ensuing physical, social, and other materialistic goals), are pretty similar, but their results are radically different. Physicists suggest that antimatter is gravitationally attracted to matter, so it is evil spirits to blessed ones. The essence of the discrepancy is quite clearly expressed in the formula of the ancient Indian yogis, who said that they teach not how to live here but how to leave here. Also, Pythagoras (as cited by Cicero) told his disciples that although they came into this world, they are not of this world; therefore, they should contemplate this entire gathering place full of life as a giant Olympic Games without getting involved in anything.

The fractal geometry and the key to musical harmony (octaves, fifths, tones, etc.) are also based on the concept of the tetractys, reflecting the harmony of the universal spheres, as the ancient Greeks thought. They were sure that the key to this harmony was the same as the key to the perfected life and its justice. By its elegant arrangement of numbers in geometrical, harmonic, and arithmetical proportions, the tetractys shows the “fount and source of ever-flowing nature,” illustrating the Greek point of view on geometry as a perfect combination of logic and beauty, and thus beieved to be of divine origin. Following Pythagoras’ proposition that “all is a

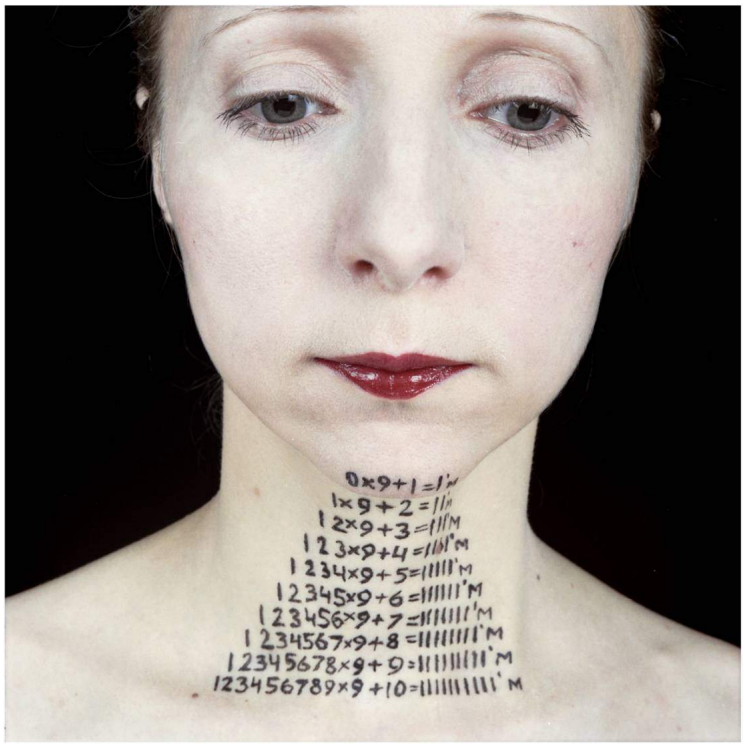


Quadra Wings © 1991, photos, metal

number," Aristotle imagined the universe as a numbered musical scale, the symphony of numbers. The inventor of calculus, Gottfried Leibniz, wrote Christian Goldbach, the author of the yet unsolved conjecture on prime numbers in number theory:

> "The pleasure we obtain from music comes from counting, but counting unconsciously. Music is nothing but unconscious arithmetic (*Musica est exercitium arithmeticae occultum nescientis se numerare animi*)" [57]

Along with the attention to numbers and their applications in our work, the presence of music in our lives was overwhelm-



Sphinx © 1990

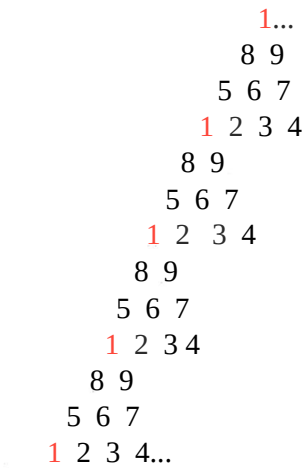
ing. The organic connection between the art of images and the art of sounds is self-evident. These forms of creativity repeat and explain each other, expressing the ebbs and flows of consciousness in both the objective and subjective senses equally faithfully. The ratio of musical tones and numbers was reflected in our works as if they were visual numerical "canons" and arithmetical "scales." In that regard, it is worth mentioning Bach's *Musical Offering* owing to its mathematically rising development. Some twenty-seven years after Bach's death, King Frederick (to whom the *Musical Offering* was dedicated) recollected how he had given a chromatic fugue to Bach, "who on the spot had made it a fugue in four parts, then in five parts, and finally in eight parts." [58] If we are to Hellenize all said, behind the tetractys stands both the art of harmony of Orpheus and the mathematics and philosophy of Pythagoras. This paradigm traces both the creative flight in evolution and intellectual order in the chaos of everything

that exists, where the objective essence reveals itself through numbers, preceding (if used as a guide) the direct experience of reality.

The tetractys presents a dramatic personification of the vision of certain rational principles inherent in the cosmic order of forces and their similarity to human energies. The same ratio can be formulated through the vocabulary of science in formulas and numbers, through the visual language of art in pictures and objects, or might be vocalized in musical relationships of tones and undertones, flats and sharps. The metaphorical harmony of the tetractys, reduced to a numerological essence, introduces the geometric projection of the world. Each digit is qualitatively different from the others, while together, they form a great "chorus" of numbers. Despite their abstractness, the numbers code the energy principles ascribed to different deities and angelic hierarchies in various religious settings. Each of these powers

The Tetractys (photo) © 1989

has its own enveloping aura or, in physicists' terms, its own electromagnetic field. For the ancients, it was not merely an intellectual concept, but a representation of an entire mystery behind the progression of the soul.



The top (1) of each previous tetractys is the "foot" of the next one. The last digit of one formation is the first in another rise. Each of these triangles represents only a step, not conveying the true meaning of being. We are not always able to estimate the exact degree of possibility, but clearly understand that it's impossible to calculate the "coefficient" of salvation by the numbers. They symbolize the process and path mythologized with symbols. Imagine a personal life or even life in general that keeps growing in number of years, attracting all kinds of events and buffets of fate, interacting with the gravitational field of ordinary matter. However, as a theological theorem, the tetractys codes the paradigm for the focusing and integration of consciousness governed by godly law.

When the tetractys is repeated, something like a spiral sequence appears, forming new decimal turns: 1, 10, 100, 1000, and so on. Each new stage begins with an intense charge received from the previous tetractys, and then obstacles limiting the dynamics arise. Still, as all types of experience of a given formation pass through, everything ends with a qualitative leap to another formation. With all this, the leap can be either up or down. The language of numbers, which are signals of specific forces, translates natural effects into

Spiral © 1996, photo, metal, pencil shading

abstract symbols, encoding both the process of formation and decomposition, degree by degree, step by step. Ontologically, this is either sublimation from matter into spirit or vice versa: consolidation or "precipitation" into matter, in other words, the immersion into another portion of chaos.

The tetractys itself is cleared of all psychophysical impurities and shows mainly "processuality." As its action is understood, each new formation flows into the next, being just a step in the integration of existence. The process can be continued indefinitely in a chain of sub-tetractyses. In its single triangular form, the tetractys is also infinite. In this

case, we are dealing with infinity from two sides: the endless multiplicity below and condensation at the top into an infinite point with no parameters.

1
2 3
4 5 6
7 8 9 10
11 12 13 14 15
16 17 18 19 20 21...

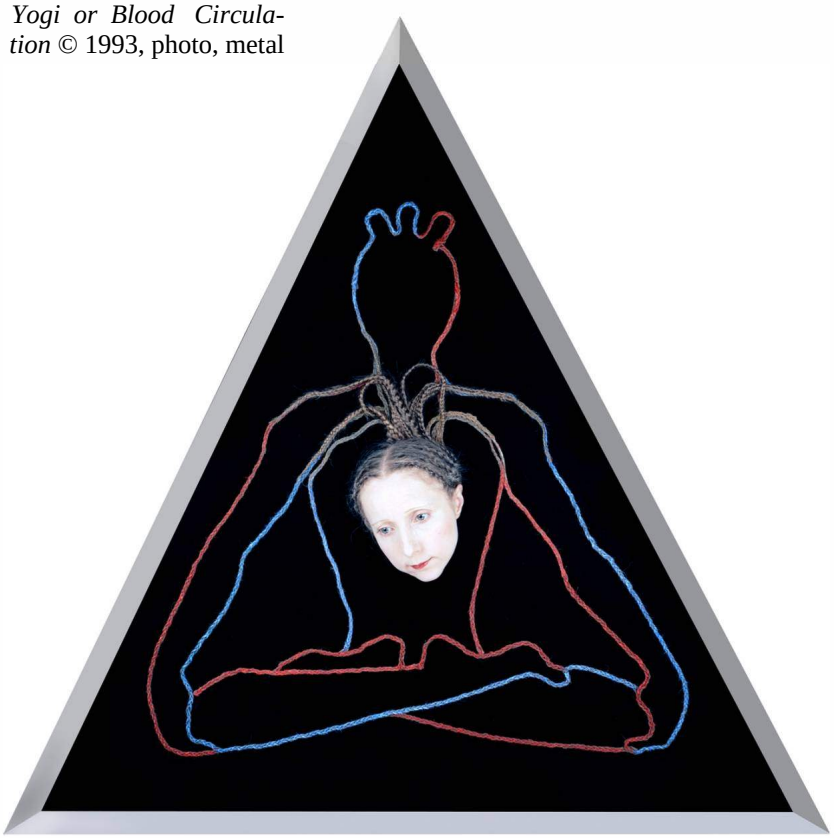
The figure of 6 rows shows the sequence applicable to 21 trumps of Tarot; each new level indicates a different period and changes in energy. In the figure of 36 rows, the last "triangular" digit of the bottom row is the apocalyptic number 666. In the old days, this whole configuration denoted a gradual descent into the sublunary zone of instincts. All that

Pregnant © 1992, photos, metal

exists emanates from one source and, the further away from it, is less and less perfect toward the bottom, more corrupted and degraded. Symbolism in the ancient world was always related to practical functions and contained warnings against natural preconditioned misconceptions. The way life descends here is the same way it ascends back, despite the different traits of movement, advantageous or disadvantageous, and different compression in time. No wonder everything is striving to rise with whatever means it can. Some raise hell along with themselves, others rise from the spiritually dead, and the very exceptional go through self-sacrifice trying to raise others from the bondage of matter.

The original unity cannot be described or analyzed. In this regard, all theological systems present this idea in approximately similar ways, as an impossibility of complete knowledge of God. The finite, in which we are confined here

Yogi or Blood Circulation © 1993, photo, metal



in matter and the mind, limited by physical capabilities, does not allow us to understand the infinite. How can you fully understand something that has no end? It is possible only by merging with it, but in this case, all concepts generated in the zone of the relative have no meaning in the absolute. Dionysius the Areopagite described the current ideas of his time in his *Celestial Hierarchy* as follows:

> "The first Divine intelligences... possess in the highest degree the holy characteristics of the orders below them, so the lowest possess the powers of the higher, not in equal measure, but in a subordinate degree... And thus, throughout the whole Hierarchy, the higher imparts that which they receive to the lower, and through the Divine providence all are granted participation in the Divine Light in the measure of their receptivity." [59]

All are coordinated according to the law of correspondence in the universe, which is the outcome and development of one Grand Thought. The celestial orders of harmonies make an endless hierarchy of unities to subdivide into other unities. These were not only metaphysical fantasies but rational, albeit picturesque, structures behind the paradigm of all life, including social organization. Thus, the unintelligent multiplications of the low elements damage the more advanced individuals of the hierarchy, injuring the whole supporting system, including the very low strata, whose members are incapable of comprehending what they are even doing.

Before the tetractys was depicted on Valeriy's face, it appeared in his metal reliefs. In its sculptural version, each growing row of heads fuses its linear grouping, leaving out only the top head, on which the number 10 is punched out, thus reverting to all uniting singularity rounded here by zero. Postulating the reconciliation of the notions of unity and diversity, the author also stressed the need to recover identity from the overall sameness inherent in life. Numbers punched on clear lapidary structures are isolated from the fluidity of time, which is conducive to coming into contact with the zone of archetypes, and the intuitive knowledge gained there can be translated into the language of art. In this sense, the metal relief *Tetractys* might be especially significant. Its tiers rise in rows of numbered heads, forming a symphonic choir

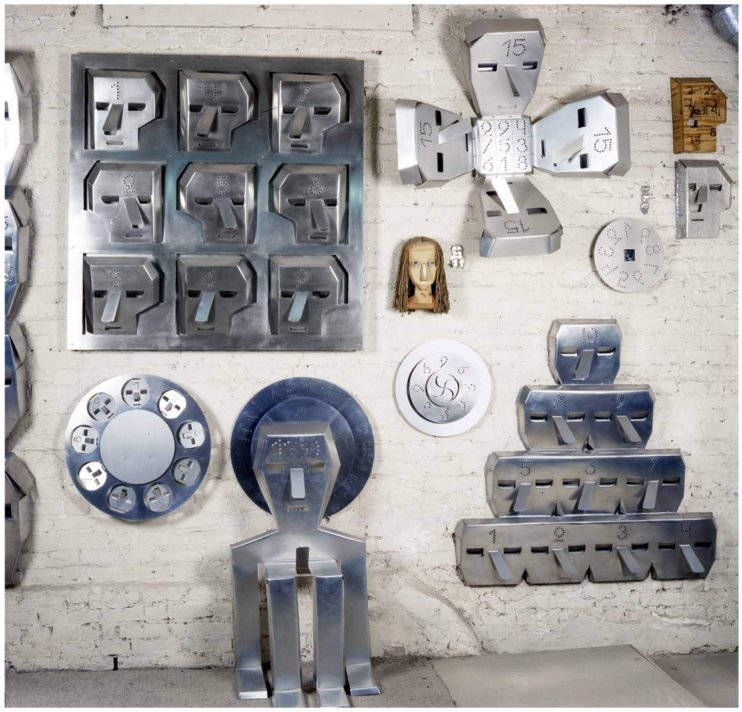
V. G., *The Tetractys*, 1987,
aluminum, 114.3 x 117 x 15 cm

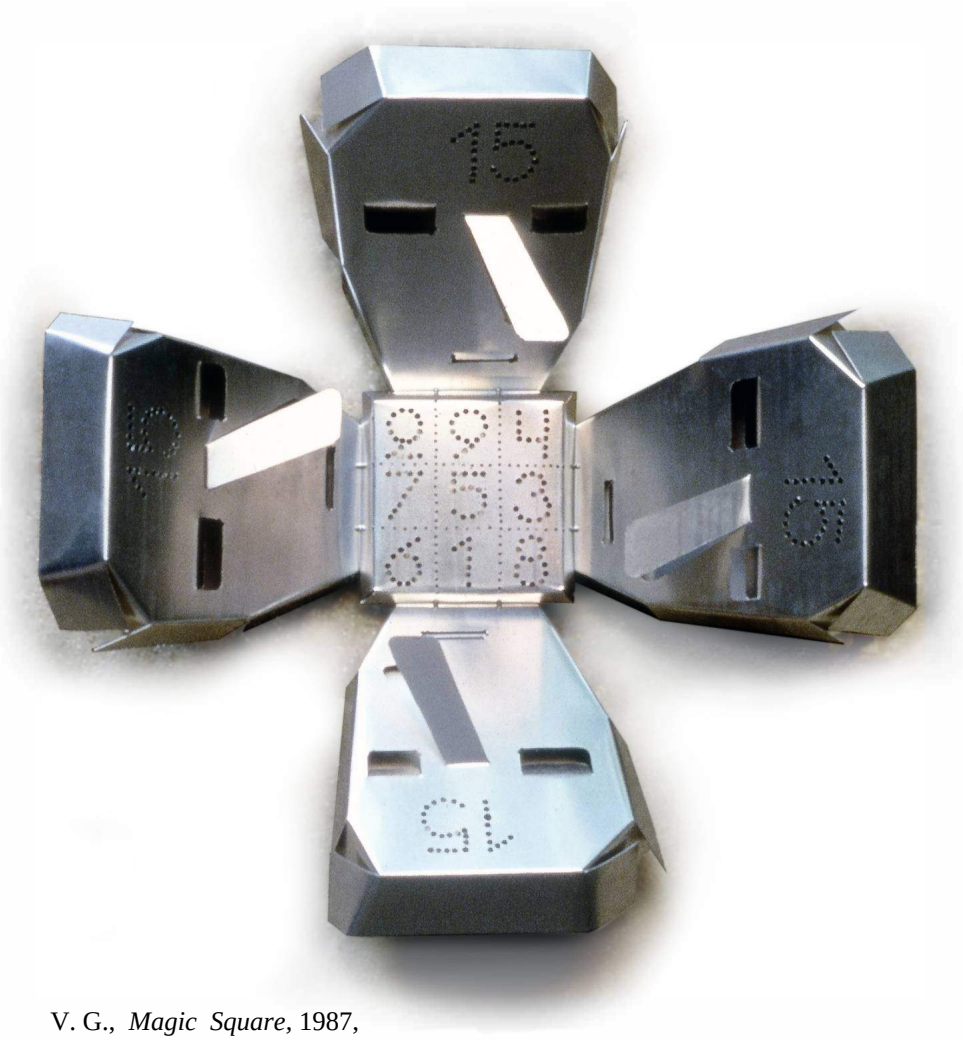
that expresses harmonious unity through multiplicity. Summarizing all these kinds of wonders and knowledge, Valeriy envisaged the tetractys as an anthropomorphic arrangement of numbers, like a polyphonic singing of one melody that reverberates in many different tones, or, in the Pythagorean sense, like a harmony of spheres.

This creative matrix develops through sequences, alternating in their forces like yang and yin. The slants of the noses in the metal relief indicate the dynamic shifting of the heads' rows to the right and the left, like the pluses and minuses in the equation. Switching from one direction to

another does not lead to dichotomy, but rather promotes the symmetry of the internal dialogue of two opposite-charged poles. Their neutral conductor is the vertex with the singularity equal to a point. Both these poles have a share of constructive and destructive aspects, personified by the digital symbols. Thus, odd numbers were considered positive, active, and masculine, while even numbers were called negative, passive, and feminine. Many systems inherited this binary: in Masonic symbolism, they are the white column of *Joachim* and the black column of *Boaz,* while in the *Sefer Sefirot* in Kabbalah, they are the right and left branches of The Tree of Life. The odd numbers were taken as a leading force due to their property: when added to any even number, they always produce an odd number. According to old prejudice, the left hand was considered unlucky; symbolically, it points to the west, toward the setting of the departing sun. *The Journey to the East,* in Hermann Hesse's allegory, means moving toward the rising sun on the right, keeping oneself

V.G., sculptures in our loft on
Spring Street, New York, 1987





V. G., *Magic Square,* 1987,
aluminum, 99 x 99 x 30.5 cm

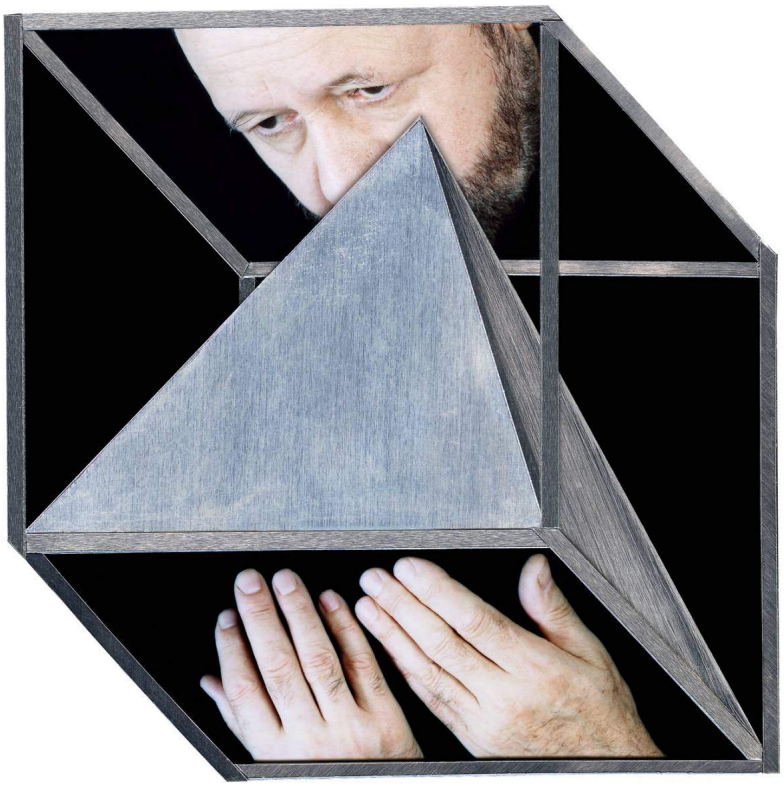
spiritually awake. How seriously right and left were taken shows the custom in ancient Rome of stationing a boy at the door of a mansion to caution visitors not to cross the threshold with their left foot.

Valeriy used different combinations of numbers in his sculptural reliefs. Many of them are cut out and folded from single sheets of aluminum like *origami,* reflecting the principles of continuity, elasticity, and unity in the paradigm of creating many from one. Like humans, these digital powers wear the faces, as if they govern the physical life through their numinous codes. These faces preserve the same impassive expression as the numbers punched on their foreheads.

They are visual signals of rising numerical forces that are mere symbols of faces rather than conceptual personas. Metal sculptures are removed from the social and emotional bombardment plaguing many artists' work. Calm contemplation of the spatial forms with geometric radiation annuls the tendency to strife between reason and passion.

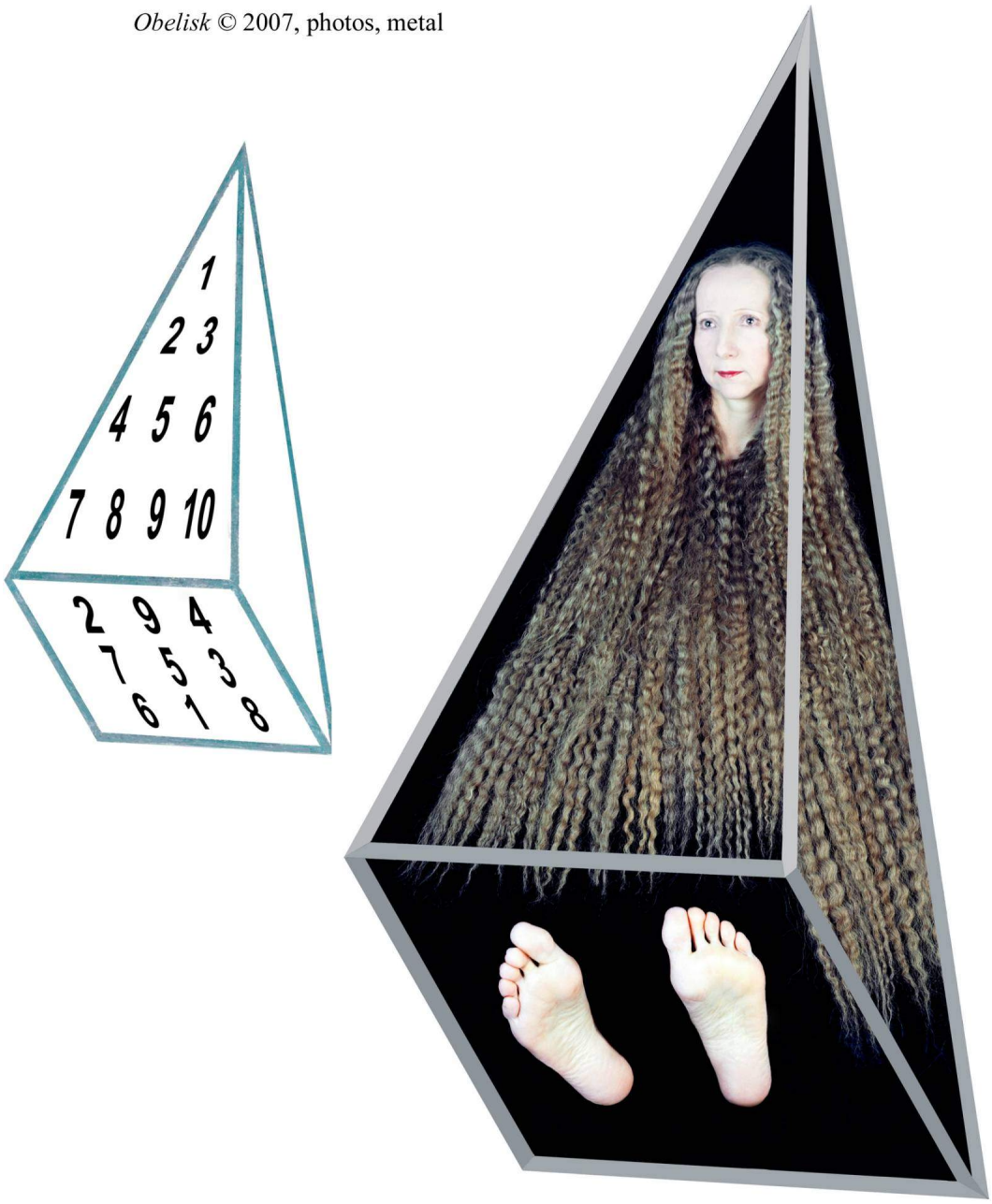
The relationship between the ancient Greek tetractys and even more ancient Egyptian pyramid is beyond doubt. The ancients felt the number symbolism acutely; suffice it to mention that the speed of light, 299,792,458 m/s, matches the coordinates of the Great Pyramid of Giza, 29.9792458°N. Hypothetically, we can envision the tetractys/pyramid connection in the work *Pyramid in Cube* by positioning the magic square on the shared bottom of these two figures and four tetractyses on the sides of the pyramid. Together, they form a kind of cosmogonic *Flat Solid.* The "bottomless"

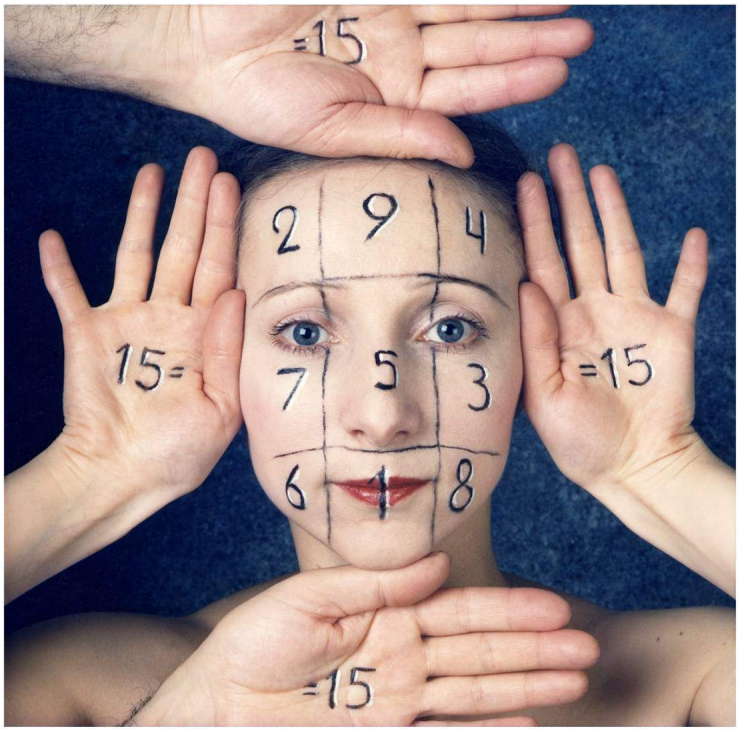
Pyramid in Cube © 2009, photos, metal



magic square that entwines and traps the ethereal and the physical designates the gravity of life. The four vertical tetractyses represent the dynamic paradigm of the ascending and descending energy of cosmic evolution and involution.

Obelisk © 2007, photos, metal





Gerlovina, Berghash, Gerlovin, *Magic Square* © 1987

The relationship between the sum of the low row of the tetractys and the sum of a magic square is based on the constant:

1
2+3
4+5+6 = 15 is the sum of 3 x 3 magic square
7+8+9+10 = 34 is the sum of 4 x 4 magic square
11+12+13+14+15 = 65 is the sum of 5 x 5 magic square
16+17+18+19+20+21 = 111 is the sum of 6 x 6 magic square
.....etc.

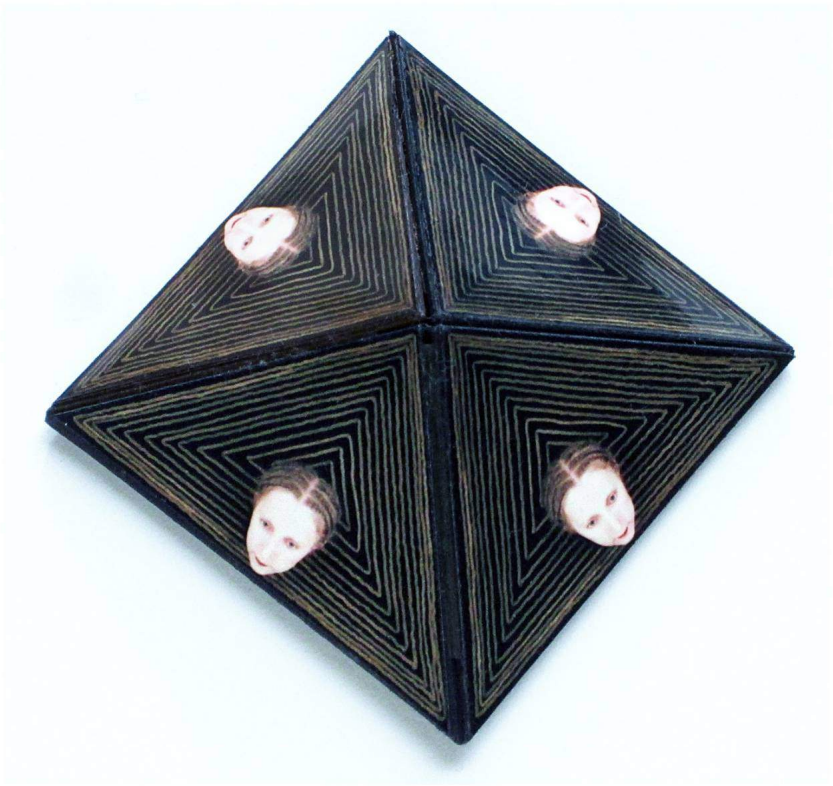
Hidden behind the digital inventory of their powers, the paradigms of the tetractys and magic square also encode multi-staged and multi-faceted connections between the ideal and its projection, gradually materializing into this world. In an abbreviated version, it is a correlation of nirvana and samsara. The *Pyramid in Cube* touches upon that idea

visually, leaving aside the metaphysics. The fire element symbolized by the pyramid is enclosed in the earth element associated with the cube. The four tetractyses fuse at the top, which apex Joseph Campbell defined on the example of the dollar bill pyramid:

> "When you're down on the lower levels of the pyramid, you will be on either one side or the other. But when you get to the top, the points all come together, and there the eye of God opens." [60]

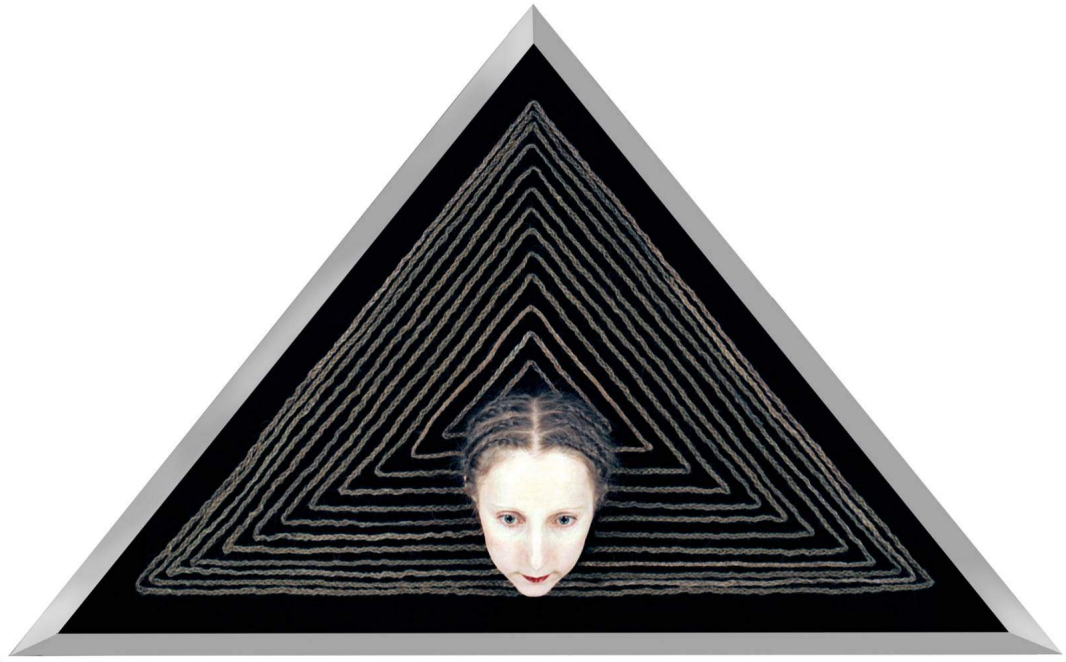
This idea can be traced to various traditions of the earliest days, where it was a living symbol. *Exempli gratia*, Asian nomads imagined the world in the form of a pyramidal tent, and the divine light entered it through a hole at its top. Through this hole, they all descended into the world and then returned to heaven. The pyramid and the tetractys symbolize

Axis © 1990



Pyramid © 2008, photos

Triangle © 2008, photo, metal



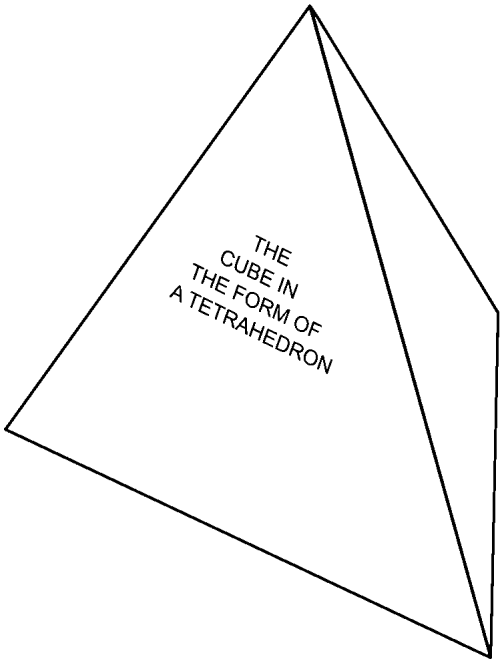
the world's progression and regression with all their components and inhabitants, including man. This digital arrangement is a model of a unified field theory of everything seen from different perspectives and points of view – a model of everything taken together, covering dialectics, geometry, music, psychology, physiology, etc.

In *Thread Pyramid*, the idea of a three-dimensional body is, as it were, suspended in the air – the pyramid is there, and yet it is not. There is no pyramid per se, and yet it is there. Its form is carved out from metal, like a window, and its absence is filled by a human presence. The imaginary edge of

Thread Pyramid © 2005,
photo, metal, thread knot

the pyramid formed by a thread belongs to the plane of the photograph, while the tie at its top is a real knot. Involuntarily, the viewer's imagination itself completes this three-dimensional figure. A knot is just a sign with a figurative meaning. If the universe is to be compared to the pyramid (which is known from the chronological vaults of the past), then the integration of the universal essence belongs only to the very top of the pyramid, in which all roads converge at one point. Consequently, everything below is subject to at least a dichotomy: the world of ideas and the world of physical bodies, time and eternity, truth and falsehood, day and night, etc., *ad infinitum.* If we accept that over the years, the operation of consciousness in its metamorphosis acquires material connections and characteristics, then many archetypal elements become understandable in the surrounding reality. The boundaries between different layers of reality are erased, just as there is essentially no specific boundary be-

R.G., *The Cube in the Form of a Tetrahedron,* 1974, 8 x 8 x 8 cm, cardboard, fabric, paper. It questions the notion of human perception, as it doubts man's closed-circuit ability to monitor life in its true essence. Collection of Center Pompidou, Paris



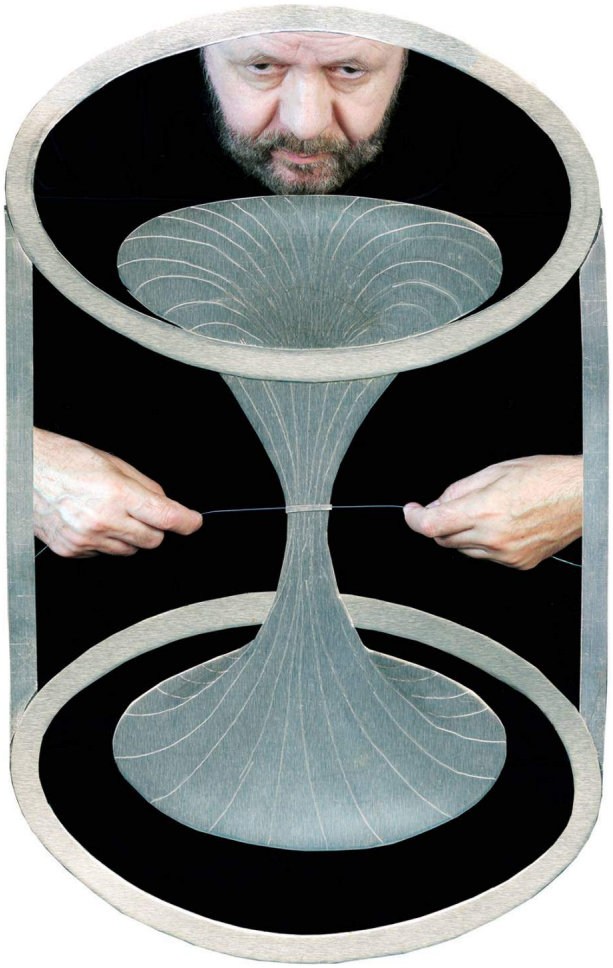
Triangulation © 2008, photo, metal

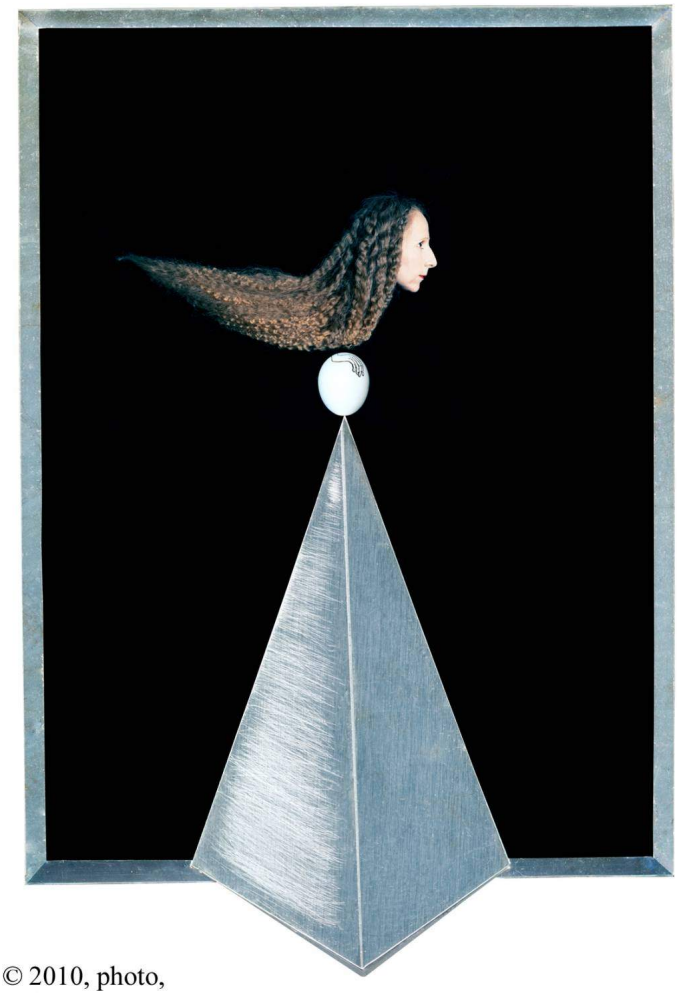
tween light and its spectral diffusion. Likewise, the final boundary between consciousness and matter is elusive and "hung" somewhere between superstrings. And if, in our case, they are wire or thread, this does not mean that they should be taken literally.

The pyramid includes quaternary and ternary; the latter rises from the flat square bottom of multiplicity to the upper fine point. This point was interpreted as an exit from the three-dimensional pyramid of natural existence into further dimensions of life. There is a certain similarity between the application of a pyramid in antiquity and the contemporary

ideas of astrophysicists. The reputed *Einstein-Rosen-Podolsky Bridge* theory suggests a model for a possible gateway to a parallel universe. It is pictured as a funneling bridge or a wormhole between two smoothed pyramids or cones (one is inverted) via their top points. In the metaphysical language, this tunnel was a sign or rather a method, even "a duration," of slowly relinquishing the forces of gravity. The whole configuration slightly reminds the one of an hourglass in which sand smoothly pours in opposite directions toward its top. Due to its transfusing nature, this bridge is sketched in the image *Crossing the Bridge* with anamorphic plasmatic plas-

Crossing the Bridge © 2008,
photos, metal, etching





Steeple © 2010, photo, metal, etching

ticity, less characteristic of the structural approach of the ancients, who used two pyramids as a symbol of a similar bridge.

The language of numbers simply translates natural effects into abstract principles without changing the genetic foundation. In the ancient tradition, the pyramid symbolized the three rising strata of awareness, similar to the progression in the tetractys, albeit with smoother gradations. Depending on the vector of the movement, downwards or upwards, it can be regressive or progressive. From the perspective of a rolling stone that gathers no moss, the downfall is the acceleration and dissipation of movement, supported by the law of

gravitation. The long and winding road up is beset with difficulties and setbacks precisely because it goes against the same law. In the mysteries of the pyramids, this path is shown by the beetle, the sacred scarab rolling up its egg preserved in coats of mud. Sisyphus, whose perpetual task in the world of shades is to roll up the hill a huge stone that always bounds down again, might serve as a parody of this mystery at best and a parallel at worst.

The same tetractys underlies the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, derived from Hellenistic and ancient Egyptian sources, with the addition of rather replete secondary layers. Here, the tet-

Handy Pyramid © 2002

Branching © 1997, the lines
are drown with light

ractys is rebuilt into a more descriptive and mystified form, characteristic of the overall style of Kabbalistic law and accounting. Esotericism, mixed with an accumulation of mentalized symbols and verbal formulas, seems to lead away from the crystalline geometric precision of the tetractys, allowing one to bypass dogmatic traps. Perhaps its structure reflects the roots of Hellenic consciousness with its splendid lapidary style and philosophical clarity of conclusions.

By its essence, the tetractys is an anonymous code of archetypes incorporated into all types of experience in matter. The four levels of the tetractys correspond to different zones: transcendental, mental, psychic, and physical. In their hierar-

chy, starting from the world of the divine, the following world of archetypes emanates astral and mental formation that descend into the zone of practical application in the world of physical action. The strata become denser and denser, leading down to a purely emotive understanding, then misunderstanding, and descending to the sediments of instinct. The last and least area is the broadest and densest part of the pyramid, which, according to the rules of the tetractys, can be extended *ad infinitum.*

IT IS TOO SIMPLE,
SO IT IS DIFFICULT

String Pyramid © 2010,
photo, metal, 49 x 42 cm

Let us move our attention from the general scale to the specific layers. It would be wiser to skip the top point 1, veiled in profound mysteries, and introduce the layer next to it as a zone of pure intelligence. In the opinion of Heinrich Zimmer (via Joseph Campbell):

> "The best things can't be told; the second best are misunderstood; and the third best is what we talk about." [61]

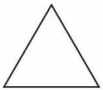
With only the third best on hand, we talk about the first and the second best, hence the understanding of which is very limited. Imagine how pure intelligence and its light gradually vanish as movement goes down the scale. Each tetractys number is an implicator, mathematical, philosophical, and psychophysical. Each point is a measurement in itself. Therefore, concretizing their interpretation may create more fog than a clear, impartial definition. Hence, we only suggest the ideas behind the numbers rather than prove them.

1 .

The first monad is indefinable. An inexhaustible singularity in which the entire multitude is already contained in potency. Dot.

2 ——

The unity is polarized, becoming the "organ of *prakriti"* through which everything is realized. It is the very essence of binary (yin-yang). *Vesica Pisces*. Line. Passive activity.

3 

3 unites 1 and 2 into a harmonious triangle. For Plotinus, this is 3 in 1, symbolizing the one who knows, knowledge itself, and the process of knowing simultaneously. Trinity. Plane. Harmony. Creativity.

4

The square of the earth with its four elements: 4 seasons, 4 cardinal directions, 4 elements. Stability. Life with its standards.

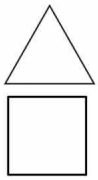
5

A star rising above the horizon of living standards determined by the square. Daring.

IVIVD mystery of FIVE.

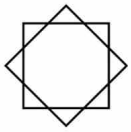
6

Balance of two triangles: one pointing up, the other pointing down. The Star of David. Two intersecting tetractyses in *Anahata*, the heart chakra. Conjunction. Marriage. 1+2+3=6.



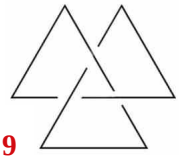
7

A break from the previous balanced formation into a triangle and a square. A triangle rises to the head, while a square descends to the legs. A circle cannot be divided into 7 equal parts. The seven-pointed star is attributed to the throat chakra *Vishuddha*. Isolation, hermitage, spectrum of initiation, breakthrough into the next sphere.



8

A star made of two squares. Symbol of stability and multiplication in alchemy. A preliminary step in equalizing a square with a circle, i.e., squaring a circle. The eye chakra *Ajna* is activated. The star of Lakshmi. The eight-sided cube.

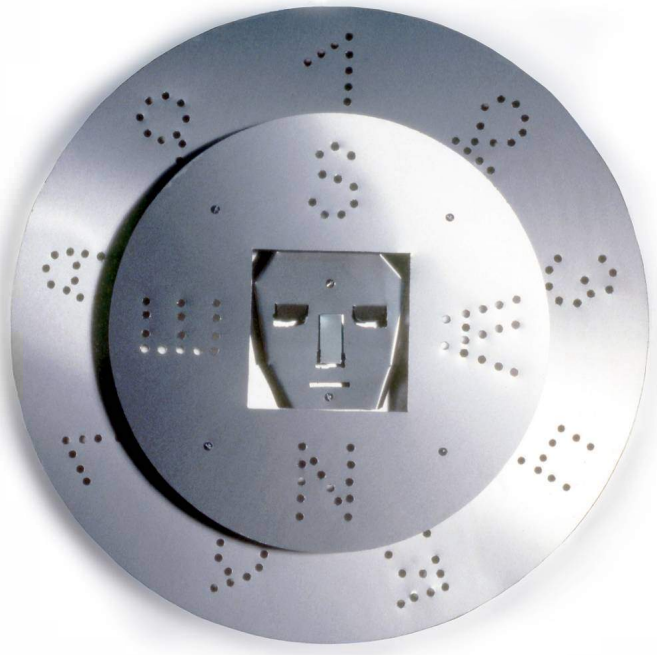


9

Three triangles. 3+3+3. 9 is inverted 6. Overcoming the final obstacle. Accomplishment. Wisdom. *Valknut* – Vikings' occult symbol. 9 months of human embryonic life. The last step before the exit.

The summit of the entire configuration of the tetractys, viewed as a point or 1 and simultaneously the final destination or 10, uniquely integrates all these levels. Hence, the discord between the mystical (inexplicable), the metaphysical (spiritual hermeneutics), the intellectual (mental zone), the psychological (emotional zone), and the physical (material and materialistic) is balanced. In various ancient cultures, the symbolic language of the human psyche was objectified in neutral numbers devoid of emotional characteristics. Reflecting and comparing different numerological systems, Eastern and Western, Egyptian and Greek, Gnostic and Kabbalistic, we came to the conclusion that the key to integration lies in their harmonization and superimposition, not in the literal sense, but in a somewhat fractal and holographic way. Our understanding did not come from books (only facts come from there) but was assimilated in a creative way. Everything happened with expedient synchronicity. It is hard to tell exactly where nature ends and art begins, and whether their circulating ideas and forms live in our minds as cinematic pictures, symbolic codes, or perhaps both.

V.G., From 1 to 9, 1988,
aluminum, 40 x 40 x 8 cm



The digital sequence of the tetractys in the metal relief *Circle of Nine* is rearranged in a circle with nine round loop-holes containing nine poking-out heads. Instead of growing vertically, the 1 to 9 sequence is perforated on their foreheads

V.G., *Circle of Nine*, 1988,
aluminum, 60 x 60 x 10 cm

and put in a loop. The metal heads are positioned as if they belong to the figures seated around a round table. In the legends of King Arthur's knights, the round table embodied their mystical unity. The magic rites of passage are conceptualized in a round way. The shining metal playing in the light seems to be the appropriate attribute of the knights, as if they

were wearing their helmets. The crowning 10, as in the tetractys, is represented by the central empty circle in its integrity, continuity, and completeness. The center of the traditional mandala ("circle," Skrt.) is invisible; the same can be said about the top of the tetractys or the crown of The Tree of Life. The metaphor of the image intersects with the metaphysical concept that the luminous center of creation contains the source of everything striving to reintegrate with it. In Zen symbolism, an empty circle means enlightenment. The final point of the tetractys takes the form of a circle in this "arithmetized" round relief. And what is a point in math? It is without any size and has no length, height, area, or volume; ontologically speaking, it is an immeasurable singularity. At the cosmic level, our world is also a point. At such a point, located beyond any definition, is the beginning of the sensory world we belong to.

⊙ur⊙b⊙r⊙s

Although the relief *Circle of Nine* conveys kinetics purely symbolically, the sensation of rotation is reminiscent of the dynamics of the circle as such. Its infinity and the force wave perpetually running around the circle also add to the idea of an invisible propulsion. The metal heads, with their numbers, represent the set of points equally distant from the center or point of emanation. The symbol of the circle is a moving image of eternity in its primordial immobility. An essential property of the series of metal circles is their geometric proportionality, symmetry, and balance, which, at least to some extent, convey an attempt to imagine a universal "symphony of spheres" in art.

7: THE CIRCLE

There is no straight line as such; if you draw a line continuously over the surface of the Earth, it will be a circle. So, we worked with circles. Some of the circles are flat, as in *True-False* or *The Sun over the Sea.* while others are made as three-dimensional objects. The circle is a universal symbol, geometrically perfect and self-contained. Considering that each point along its perimeter has an equal distance to the center, it symbolizes the oneness of all things in relation to their source. It means integrity, continuity, dynamism, the

True-False © 1992, photo, metal

absence of a beginning and end, top and bottom, and all cyclic and endless movement. In Buddhism, the circle represents the wheel of samsara, which includes everything in the world of phenomena. If we reduce a circle *ad infinitum* and abstract from its parameters, it can be reduced to a point. The same operation can be done in the opposite direction. If you expand the boundaries of a point to infinity, you get a limitless circle with no parameters. It flows from a point. Likewise, time is contained in its indefinable point from which it flows, i.e., in one eternal moment, which always appears as "now." According to the Gnostic formula, the divine source is a circle, the center of which is everywhere,

The Sun over the Sea © 1991, photo, metal

and the circumference is nowhere.

The object *Point* is one of our cardinal works concerning the eternal theme of searching the human self, unclassifiable, incorruptible, and far beyond *la vie personnelle.* The top circle features the large hands, seemingly focusing attention on a small face. The wide-open eyes look out of the circular hole as if from the hatch. Let us "po-i-nt" out that all that remains of the central "i" in this word is a meaningful dot, which holds the entire composition. Sometimes, the word can be a concept containing the entire language. Objectively, the word means what it's meant to, but it refers to a more profound and nonverbal something, whatever this something may be. In Hinduism, the remnant dot on the forehead is called the *Bindu* sign, the eye of Shiva, or the third eye in the *Ajna* chakra, symbolizing the third all-seeing eye, anther form of inner vision that connects with the higher order of existence and protection. Something similar is ascribed to *wedjat* or the eye of Horus, the deity of ancient Egypt. It's hard to determine this symbol's chronological and spatial boundaries, which still retains its relevance. Traditionally, the unified "cyclopic" eye was associated with the pineal gland, which atrophies in the vast majority of humans. The power of pineal secretions, analogous to the elixir of life or philosopher's stone, bestows increased brain capacity, well-developed intuition nearing clairvoyance, and much more - the cognitive explosion leads to entirely new ways and speeds of understanding. To calibrate it further, not only are certain commonly called magical abilities evoked, but also an integrative cognition of the extra dimensions of the human consciousness that comes beyond the intellect.

The mystery behind the third eye, associated with the opening of the chakra *Ajna* ("command," Skrt.), was traditionally connected with the endless process of training the mind in the art of clear thinking, meditation, and silence. The unenlightened mind is but thick grey matter; it simply swallows up all information into its obscurity and dullness, much like how the stomach digests food. The mind is the sphere of duality, in fact, consisting of the two spheres of the brain. We can't join them simply like two balls of dough to get rid of their dichotomy; they have to be united with mental and spiritual acuity in such a gradual, intricate way that the mind is able to acquire certain supra-mental abilities. In

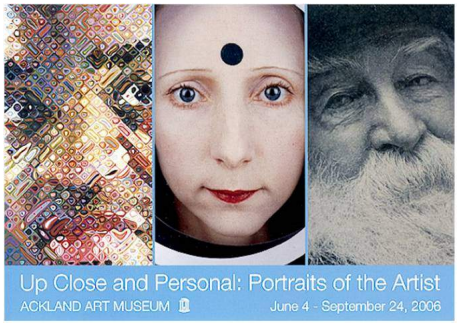
short, the centralization of vision harmonizes the polarity of the two spheres of consciousness.

But what the mind is capable of doing doesn't necessarily mean it's doing that. One might more easily train a

Point © 1992, C-prints in metal construction, diameter 117 cm, 10 cm deep, collection of Ackland Art Museum, Chapel Hill, NC

monkey to perform basic processes of human reasoning than untrain a human to reason using the habitual functions of one's mind, its dissipating worldliness, pseudo-useful curiosity, and excessive debilitating practicality. What is down to earth indeed is down to earth; that which is born of flesh is

flesh. A monkey, a symbol of the lower automatic mind, easily imitates and reflects everything, but not further than ancestral traits and instincts. A man who routinely follows living standards eventually becomes just a bundle of habits. Therefore, to train your inner ape, one might start with the simplest control of the dosage of bananas, i.e., curbing the extrapolation of desires and mechanical habits. If one is not to merge into some sort of engulfing collectivity, the customary way of thinking must be reinterpreted. Naturally, mind training and observation of thought processes will wander through the circuitous path of struggle with unworthy opponents and various distortions. Besides, the brain can create a sophisticated confinement for the intellect that will spin like a squirrel in a wheel.



The announcement for the exhibition *Up Close and Personal* at Ackland Art Museum, 2006, from left to right: the fragment of Chuck Close's work, *Point*, and the photograph of Walt Whitman

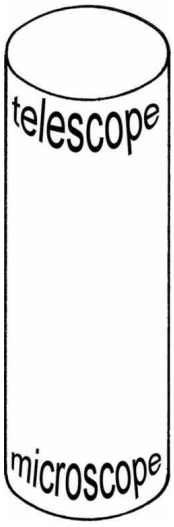
Extroverted and introverted views of the world intersect at a point that, like a wormhole in modern physics leading to another space, is the threshold of another form of awareness. In this case, a certain organ begins to function in the body, which may have the ability to receive and reflect the light and intelligence of the universe. Perhaps the idea of a symbolic third eye does not require further comment, at least in this chapter. Based on this, instead of relying on theoretical calculations, let us turn to the actual life of this work. At the exhibition at the Ackland Art Museum in 2006, it was presented in an unusual historical context; instead of describing which, we will give an excerpt from the press release:

> "The exhibition *Close-up and Personal* includes portraits of artists of the last 300 years, made in a wide

> variety of techniques and covering a variety of subjects... Peggy Guggenheim's photographic portrait of Bernice Abbott, Andy Warhol's *Liz*, Jim Dine's self-portrait, and bronze sculpture of a young Raphael by Carrier-Belleuse depict the cult of success... The symbolic portraits on the theme of death, the fluidity of time, or spiritual essence include such works as *Self-Portrait with an Angel* by Marc Chagall (1949), *Portrait of Lucas van Leyden with a Skull* by Heinrich Hondius (before 1649), and Rimma and Valeriy Gerlovin's *Point* (1992)."

One thing is clear: the ever-changing speculative form of vision, limited by its own speculations, is not the true vision itself. The *Point* is to use the mind to go beyond the mind, to use thinking to go beyond its limits. Similar to the holographic principle, the mirroring faculty of consciousness can reflect the totality as a whole. The eye of a spiritually connected person begins to see with the eye of the universe and vice versa; the universe looks at humanity with its eye. The opening of the higher intuition is like a metaphysical telescope through which one can see to infinity. It presupposes some tranquil pause for the ever-running mind, for this breathing space stimulates the mind to simultaneously work as a transmitter and receiver.

We transmit into the world our own state of consciousness, which is, in turn, molded by the reciprocal reception. Using the mind as a focusing point, we look out through our personal lens upon the world. One of Rimma's early poetic objects dealt with the complexity of mental vision in an impossible way: the small cardboard tube was marked on one side as a telescope and on the other as a microscope (1975), supposedly serving both purposes. It was a conceptual version of seeing "a world in a grain of sand" or simultaneously seeing the whole world as a single grain without contradiction and vice versa. Should one succeed in activating this magnetic force, the vortex of the thinking can eventually reach the difficult target of invulnerability when nonsense no longer blocks its own morphological root cause of sense. The old secret is hidden behind the endless process of training the mind not only in clear thinking but in silence as well, for it has to come to its "rolling stop" at the fixed fine point of



Will © 1989, photo, metal

steady contemplation without interruptions of wavering desires for worldliness.

At this point in our lives, we practiced meditation rather intensively. Naturally, this was reflected in our art in the desire to stop the mind from wandering around, from chatting habits, and altogether from the danger of its wane consumption in the tumults around. Concentration was not an easy task; it uncovered many unsuspected deviations like a point of freezing or a point of boiling of mind, characterized by tension and a desire for a quenching balance of not too much and not too little. Contrary to expectations, one might find that one's mind patterns become almost uncontrollable precisely when one tries to control them. Our interest in concentration was expressed in many works of this period, such as

the image *Will,* in which this word "emanates" with the "rays" of visual poetry inscribed on the forehead like a *bindu* dot.

We really got our minds around the composites of circles and spirals. Various ideas grew in our imagination as a vast vortex of sublime matter, taking "brain spinning" forms with different angles and directions of their bending and coiling. The thinking process can spiral in and out; hence, the image *Inspiraled,* with its wordplay between "spiral" and "inspire," replays this idea in a circular way. Many forms in nature follow the pattern of spirals and circles, from the prints of our fingers to circles on the water or mysterious crop circles, causing lively scientific and metaphysical disputes. Life itself is cyclic; it spirals up to spiral down, it spirals out to spiral in. Our somewhat "head-spinning" relief, with its parabolic curvature and circular dynamism, might

Inspiraled © 1993, photos, metal

Labyrinth © 1990, photo, metal

serve as a metaphor for the retroversion of mind to infinity – step back in order to step ahead. Supposedly, an unbroken thread of thoughts leads to the truth, for each discovery serves as the basis for another. However, here lies the paradox: when one tries to escape from the circle, one is trapped by going in a circle. Spiral thinkers can access beyond the ego functions and always seek progress, but it is progress in spirals, if not in circles. The *notion* of wisdom is not *wisdom.* and a faculty of understanding is superior to deductive and discursive reasoning. Viewing all said through a theological mirror, we do not suggest setting the mind in motion towards something grand that it could not, by definition, ever reach, yet it is quite likely that in the center of a spiral, man can meet himself.

The half-hidden face of the twisting work *Vibraining* is wrapped in woolen hair. Its braided semi-intelligible title, sonically echoing "brain-vibrating-braiding," suggests the mind's agility, which psychic elasticity noticeably contrasts with the rigidity of its habitual forces. The mind is our inner controller, the voice of consciousness, and, should it show strong willpower, it would be able to "clothe" its thoughts in a fluid matter with its specific color and aroma. Each thought has its own energy, carries invisible weight, and implements some action even if one thinks it mindlessly, obtusely, and

Vibraining © 1993, photos, metal

Fecundity © 1990, photo, metal

even foolishly. Imagine an ultra-diligent thinker, with his obsessive brain in its obsessive way, that can sit alone and think... and think... until his mind is lost. Brain surgeons can see the brain firsthand. One might think that by looking into so many people's brains, they must be wise. However, the antithetical construction of the mind suggests that everything that is affirmed can also be denied.

What we have within us creates the circumstances outside us because our mind makes its own joy and suffering. To start from the outset, thoughts of savages at a lower stage of progress do not exceed the level of material needs. Developing some new skills, they gradually mutate. Some changes might be for the good if new mental elements are pure, while some are otherwise if they arouse base bodily instincts and

passions. In average statistics, all brain functions of a man focused exclusively on material resources have similar intentions: to mine the gold or snatch it from his neighbor. But, even this mechanical behavior has its value, for the brain can atrophy if it doesn't work and end up in passivity and systematic dullness, becoming mummified. A positive and sincere impulse creates protection: bright and powerful thoughts repel fluidic larval thinking, which toxic remnants can swarm around long enough. We bring them from the streets and crowded events. Destructive images and terrifying news reports can carry poisonous energy; they enter our brains as if unwanted visitors enter our homes. But earnest aspiration for

Changing Globe © 1994, photo, stainless steel, diam. 122 cm, collection of the Progressive Corporation

good and peace helps sweep away all heavy, harmful fluids and establish a stable sense of wellness. In essence, mental light is a safe guardian from mental darkness.

The geometric center of *Magnet Ring* is hidden in virtual reality. The inner surface, made from silvery metal, is smooth and hollow, while the outer semi-closed circle depicts the trick of magnetism. Standing on the end, the hair works like a magnet, attracting the bare feet. The head is a hypnotic subject. Thoughts are also matter gifted with quick movement

Magnet Ring © 1993, photos, metal

and qualities adjusted to the “chemical” compound of the soul, which fluid and ineffable plasticity allows it to manifest itself in the context of our time. However, the conventional nature of mental habits is somewhat limited. Voiding fiction and mythological clouds, the sober mind goes only to a certain point and then begins to move in circles, unless it is transformed by opening to the higher sources. Sri Aurobindo once remarked that he used the language of the mind because there is no other way that people understand, and most of them understand it badly.

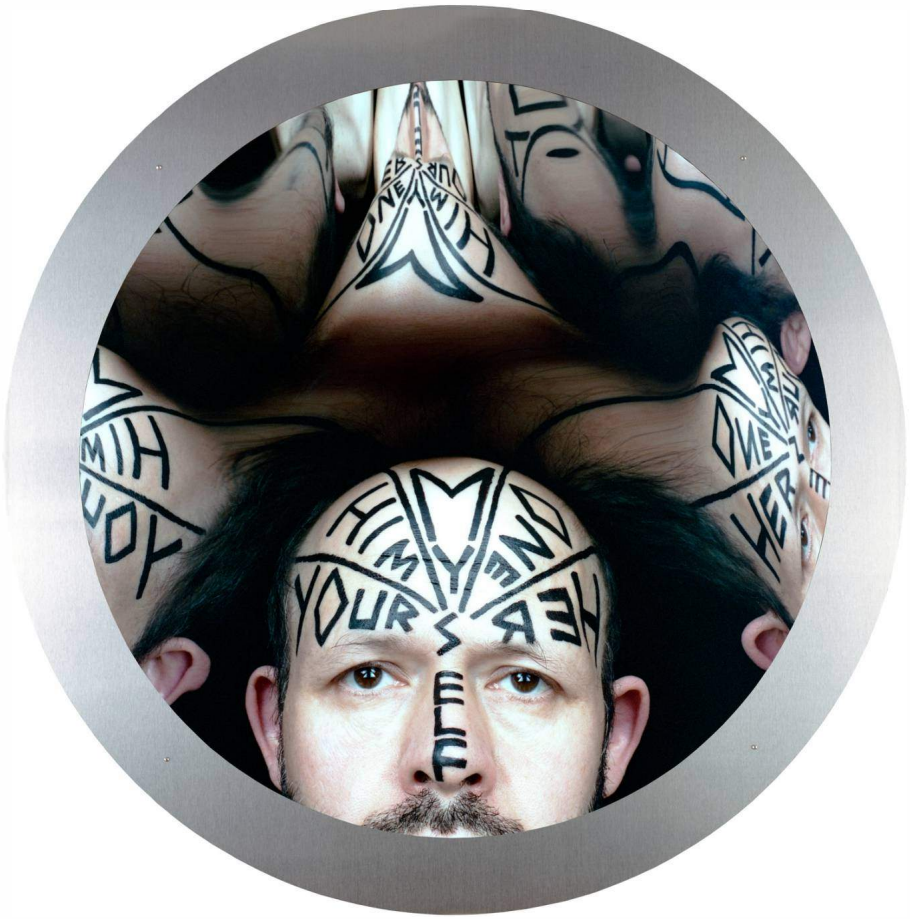
Not many are aware of the strange work taking place in their brains, where elusive currents are absorbed from the

Magnet © 1991, photo, metal

outer world. It's easy to become infected mentally (and even physically) and fall into confused unrest in the vertigo of the mind and senses. There are chaotic and mechanical thoughts that gibbering and fluttering like bats trapped in the attic of the human brain. Everything tends to break into fragmented notions, and even time feels like a chaos of isolated seconds. With alarming speed, thoughts may appear behind your head and multiply like cells on the borderline of chaos and neurosis. One can be cured of a neurosis but never cured of oneself.

The mirror of the mind, once dubbed *speculum mentis* in Latin, reflects the world erratically in a pool of associa-

Self © 1990, photo, metal



Chaos © 1990, photo, stainless steel, diam. 122 cm

tions. That feature is expressed in our series of kaleidoscopic works reflecting images in limitless progressions through arched and curving mirrors. Mirrors can be a means of self-deception rather than self-knowledge. The round *Chaos,* with its dizzying ripples of the organic chemical compound with the formula of chaos (which is, as science assures us, structured and organized), provides a glimpse into the looking glass of the subconscious through its complex and kaleidoscopic forms that mirror each other. Imagine our personal chaos intersecting with molecular and galactic chaos through such a polyphony. The mental mirror of a man reflects the universe and mystery of the creation, whose form is a multi-

tude, but unity remains its essence. So, we convey it through a human face with seemingly chaotic thoughts branching out to infinity.

The face of *Kronos* turns into a self-reproducing crowd of its own kind, as if an individual yet "holographic" image is storing a legion of singularities. The self-perpetuating chaos of the crowd was built through a reflection of a reflection; of one another. The old sun god, Greek Kronos, Rome's Saturn, was designated as Father Time, who had unpleasant habits of eating his own children and spitting them back into the universe again. For the enlightened Hellenes, Kronos was inhaling and exhaling not the gods but various ideas, con-

Kronos © 1990, photo, metal

cepts, and thoughts. Hence, our image depicts not an anthropological catastrophe but a thinking process, one that devours and regurgitates, the two sides of the human mind. According to the Eastern concept, the world has been created solely from a subtle matter of generative thought. So, our visual multiplication does not violate that idea, as it features it on the face, reflecting alteration of evolution and involution.

The open mouth is also kind of a circle with the circumference of the lips and the radius of the tongue. In the *Bhagavad Gita,* Krishna behaves similarly to Kronos, showing the mouth of devouring time. In his mouth, opened as an abyss, Prince Arjuna sees the entire universe and the

Ego © 1989, photo, metal

horror of its destruction. Frightened, Arjuna begs Krishna to return to his sweet but deceptive human form because the illusion of alluring maya feels safe and normal, while the vision of the frightening reality induces fear, nearing religious madness.

In ordinary circumstances, neither mental infection nor the rotation of mechanical thoughts is really perceptible. Thoughts are not harmless radiations or an expected outcome of brain work. They can be like a cloud of locusts swirling in the air and clinging to unprotected, vulnerable people. Each crowded place has its own fluid population of these disordered pests. The roar of big cities is full of thoughts of people overwhelmed by depression, an insatiable thirst for pleasure, passion, fear, rage, or any kind of malice. Instead of hearing the inner voice, whose sound frequency appears "scrambled," one begins to hear "in-nervo-ice."

As always, things can be good and bad, for we can open ourselves solely to that which is in harmony with our limited nature, protected by its very lack of receptivity. We don't suspect the hidden danger of invasion into our thoughts until we achieve mental independence from the bustling chaos of the world. At the moment, when it calms down in the head, and the thinking process no longer wanders through its countless labyrinths, something might open up. Should the mind cease reflecting the phantoms of the surrounding life and imitating them unconsciously, one can feel a quiet and clear atmosphere inside and outside. Thus, living in the world but not belonging to its chaos opens the way to receiving higher frequencies of valid information and genuine truth. Naturally, one's consciousness must be predisposed and ready to receive it. Whether the "orifice" that opens will remain open is another question.

Orbit © 2008, photo, metal

The round relief *Orbit,* coding the paradox of repetitive exploits, might be presented as a mandala of Sisyphus, the unfortunate Greek condemned forever to roll a boulder up the hill after each time it rolled down. The machinery of the mental faculty has its rather predictable cognitive circuit in action. As if maintaining its circular flow of energy, the mind constantly creates its own habitat, while the surrounding world does not exist as an independent something; it is a part of the mind's thinking. Moreover, if it is limited to its innate cunning, it is fully wrapped in all its spinning in an unconscious tragedy. The mental circuit, with its external and internal influences, can cloud the intellect and forcibly drag

away even the mind of the wise into the illusive web.

The human mind might be compared to its prototype – the creator's mind, which, in Aristotle's definition, "thinks, and its thinking is a thinking of thinking." [62] As if tracing the infinite in the infinitesimal, the mental process increases in increasing, multiplies in multiplicity, and searches for sense in nonsense. Unlike the mind, consciousness is a continuum in infinity, boundless, trans-verbal, and trans-personal. The consciousness is independent of the mind; the mind is independent of the brain; the brain controls the body. According to the concept, as parabolized in *Isha Upanishad*, the mind moves swifter than the body, but the spirit moves swifter than

Infinite © 1992, photo, metal

the mind and yet moves not. It is like a motionless movement of a circle as if it is "speaking" with eloquent silence.

The circle is a symbol of infinity; there is no priority of cause to its effect; they simply meet. Without beginning and without end – they are one another. Nothing could be gained, and nothing could be lost. Anything grasped would include everything. Since the end of one rotation is the beginning of the other, it does not really matter where you leave off and where you start again. In some traditions, the circle is called "suchness," in others, "absolute" or "infinite." Fa-Tsang, a seventh-century Chinese Buddhist, "arranged ten mirrors, eight at the eight-compass points, one above, and one below;

Ad Infinitum © 1998, photo, metal

all facing each other. He put a Buddha figure in the center and illuminated it so that its image was reflected from one mirror to the other," [63] and the finite world began to look like infinity. In a way, Nam June Paik made a similar installation known as *TV Buddhas*, putting a statue of Buddha in front of a TV monitor connected to a closed-circuit camera. Two Buddhas, one as a sculpture and the other on the TV screen, face each other, caught in the closed-circuit loop in the infinite play.

R. G., *Spiral Clock,* the circle with the spiral can be rotated, 1988, plywood, acrylic, 44.5 x 44.5 x 7 cm

Infinity can express the paradox of time that circles back on itself. Can you imagine falling into it and feeling the magical effect of this alluring stunt? No ratio exists between the infinite and finite, for every finite is only part and parcel of infinity. We can always look to dictionaries to explain infinity, yet its continuity will be unresolved in our minds. But its concept and scientific purity arouse admiration. The center of all things is infinite; therefore, it is centerless.

Should the mind be tied up with the idea of infinity, it begins to change while functioning elsewhere, absorbed into a different time and space. If you gaze long enough into infinity, the infinity will gaze into you. Voltaire was also of a similar view in *Philosophical Letters,* suggesting that all essential innovations are derived from the infinite:

> "Ongoing deep down into the abyss, we can find it infinite. And now we shall see what Mr. Newton dug out of it." [64]

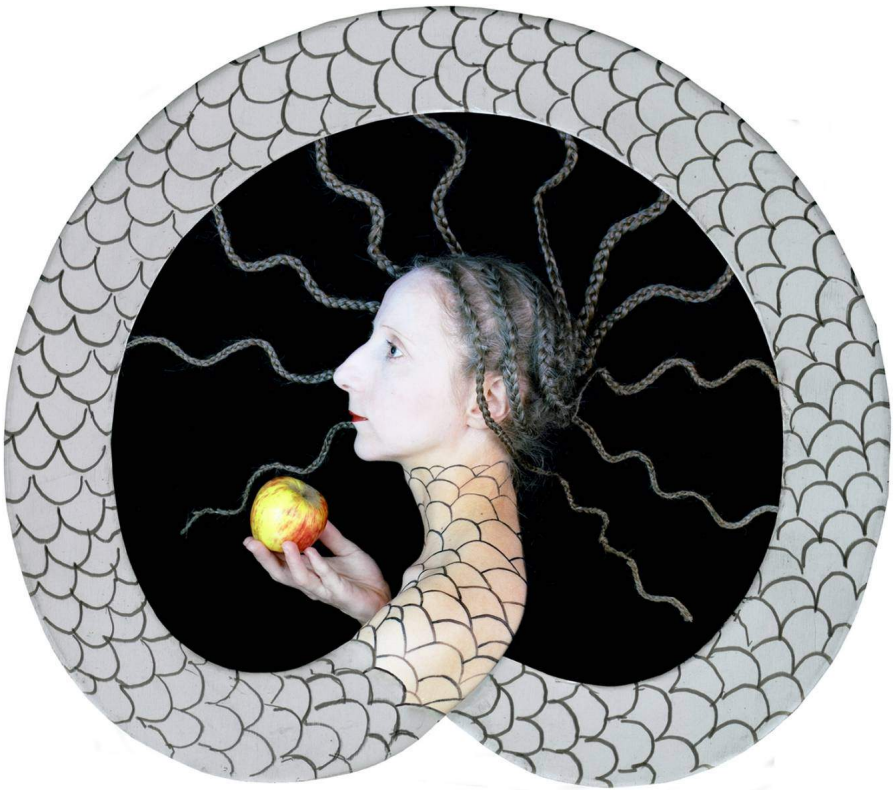
R. G., *Day by Day,* 1988. With rotation of the upper overlapping circle, the "days" written on the lower circle begin to flash, wood, acrylic, 35 x 35 x 5 cm

A sample of another circle is the relief *Ouroboros* – a snake that eats its own tail (that is what *ouroboros* means in Greek). An infinite and self-returning, self-generating loop of nature is an ancient symbol of renewal, perhaps in some obscure and devious sense. The mystery within its end-negating circle in the perpetual circulation dates back to the dusted times of ancient Egypt. Since this rotating process has no end, no ultimate result can be expected. It is a metaphoric

concept related to the principle of life, on which virtual circulation is stamped on our minds. One can spend one's entire life chasing one's obsessive mind, which reproduces and consumes itself as if it were a snake that eats its own tail. In its eternal motion, spiraling and cycling, nature progresses circularly, even when seemingly regressing.

Things are not always what they seem. Let's say ouroboros is a maya of relativity, the game of life, the delusion with its latent potency, expressing the infinite in the images of the finite. That's how subliminal zones hold us, driving us to action. Some give themselves entirely to the game of moving thoughts, to show it let us turn to an honorable source

Ouroboros © 1994/2009, photos, stainless steel construction, diam. 115 cm



Ouroboros with Apple © 1994/2006,
photo, aluminum, felt pen

of knowledge, namely to Albert Einstein, who wrote that his nature drove him to do what he actually did, but it was itself, he felt, that was driven... "What fish knows about the water in which it is swimming all its life?" [65]

Embodying the ambitious physiological force of nature, the serpent entwines the tree of life in the biblical paradise. Reducing the well-known plot to a minimum in the relief *Ouroboros with Apple*, we bred the tempting serpent to the investigating Eve. In all its tempting splendor, the ouroboros is the symbolic guardian of the latent forces of nature, with its attractive fruits – the apple is already in her hand. In swallowing its own tail, nature seems to waste its richness so blithely in generating and destroying endlessly with no regrets. The world instinctively repeats these patterns: life lives on life. We might say ouroboros presents a collective image of life feeding on itself.[66]

R. G., *Ouroboros*,1986,wood, acrylic, 25.5 x 34 x 8 cm, the head can circle the body

Observing people's lives, sometimes it seems the wheel of *Fortune* spins on its own, like a *perpetuum mobile,* and works as if a game of a perpetual paradox. While the central circle of the object *Fortune* is closed, it keeps all its mystery intact, much like a Pandora's box. As soon as its left half-circle is opened, the forces of fate begin to lure one into that great ritual drama called "misfortune." Not many dare to open this perilous portal leading to a bridge over a bottomless abyss. Under the indifferent gaze of others, this ordeal wheels as if a mill grinds the previous life like wheat into flour (for our daily bread). During this grinding process, the mind and body are at odds while intermittently injuring and curing each other. Then, opening the right half-circle leads to the outcome of the entire process. There would not be a desired fortune, but misfortune helped it as if it were a blessing in disguise. The blind thesis of a prosperous fortune provokes its antithesis – a misfortune. Then, the interaction and struggle of opposites resolve in their union – misfortuneless, as conscious and subconscious synthesis of the psyche. Everything that fills the vanity and struggle of ordinary life no longer bothers one. The mind is free from its internal conflicts. This suggests another concept: the state of fullness can be absolute only if it includes its opposite, for genuine fullness cannot be

R. G., *Fortune*: It opens as follows: fortune – misfortune – misfortuneles, 1988, wood, acrylic, 35 x 35 x 5 cm

full unless it includes emptiness as well. Like the twenty-four hours, life combines both day and night of consciousness, reflecting in its present time both our past and future concurrently and in parallel.

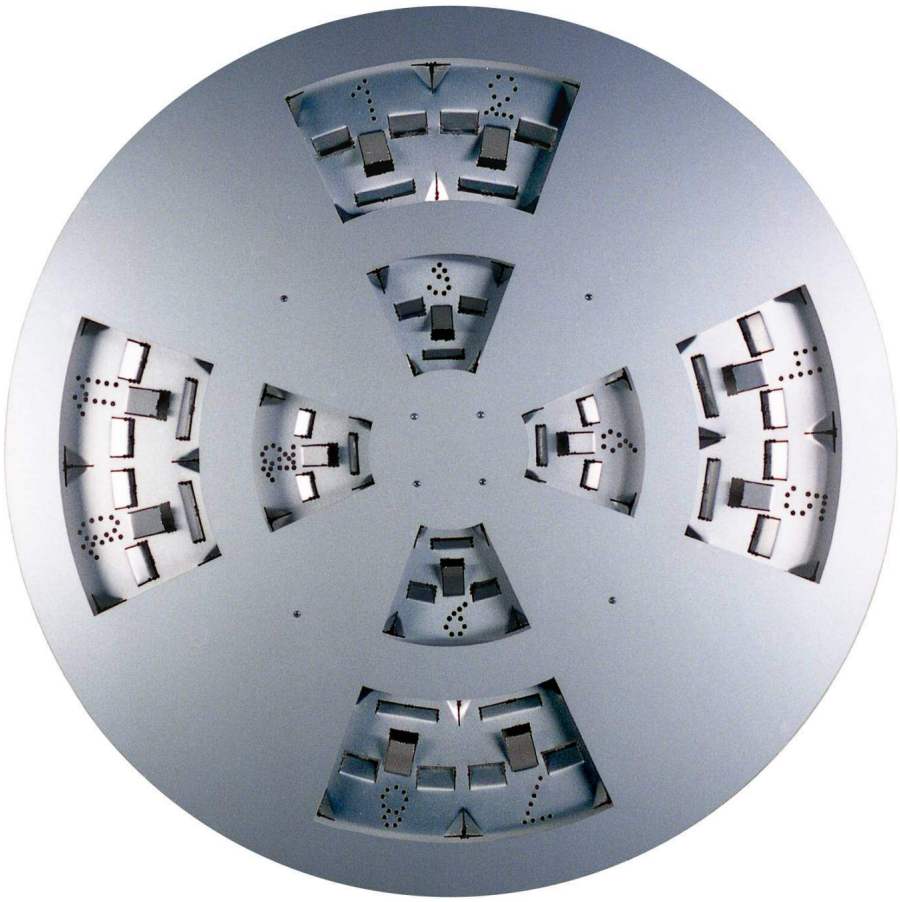
The trajectory of Rimma's three-dimensional concepts began in 1974 with the cubes, the portable semi-philosophical units that filled up our bookshelves in Moscow. In the eighties, these platonic bodies got rounded shapes; thus, talking cubes evolved into talking circles. Carved from wood, they became updated conceptual modules in which the text could be modified semantically by interacting with the circles, shifting and rotating their parts, or opening and closing their sectors. The meaning of the words turns into their

R.G., The Circles, 1988, wood, acrylic,
35 x 35 x 5 and 44.5 x 44.5 x 7 cm

opposite, and in the same manner, might be “rotated” back, provoking non-linear thinking or, perhaps, some flashes of insight. The “round poems” were talking pro and contra, joining the opposites precisely because of their round-out forms. Thus, visual poetry acquired not only volume but also a kinetic feature.

Meanwhile, the circles became the dominant form in Valeriy’s metal sculptures. Made into round shapes, they explored the sign language of universality, akin to the universality of music. Even so, the same ideas nurtured our art; their forms were different, depending on the diverse repertoire for each of us. Coming into a qualitatively different space and later time zone of our lives, we kept seeing our art as a perpetual process.

Our loft, Spring Street in Manhattan, New York,1992



V. G., *Aztec Calendar*, 1988,
aluminum, 85 x 85 x 7.5 cm

The eternal cycle of renewal is shown in the *Aztec Calendar* – a metaphor for the continuum "made" of metal. The cycle of the year, or its 12 months, is divided into four seasons, corresponding to the four "loopholes" in the composition. This metal numerical mandala ("circle" in Sanskrit) shows the perforated numbers on the faces, thus adding some ethereal pointillist effect to the otherwise solid metalwork. The Maltese cross, created from the slots deepened into the circle (representing four seasons, four cardinal directions, and four elements), comprises 12 identical and archetypal faces. This geometrical "relief of static time" somewhat resembles the Aztec stone calendar, hence its name. The

fractal repetition of the faces and the symmetry of the formation indicate the endlessly recurring cycles of time and life. Can time be seen as the ultimate form of measurement of the immeasurable, where eternity accompanies infinity? The circular chain reaction of hours in a day and months in years reflects the movement of the wheel of life called “samsara,” which involves the alternation of death and rebirth, or the wheel of dharma. In changing the external forms of all phenomena in their different cycles, their identical gist is left intact. In the Sanskrit world, the cosmos is a series of receding frames, rotating circles within rotating circles, developing a story within a story...

Although the round metal sculptures convey kinetics only *ex hypothesis* the sensation of rotation still remains. The circle never squanders its momentum; its force wave runs along the circumference, symbolizing its infinite dynamics. As such, the circle represents a moving image of eternity in its immobile stasis. A vital part of the whole series of metal circles is their geometrical construction and proportionality according to the laws of symmetry and balance. In visual art, these qualities convey a faint equivalent of the Pythagorian symphony of spheres, the cosmograms of the universe. If the ancient Greeks arithmetized their logic mandalas, the Tibetans depicted them ornate, coding their meaning pictographically, “inhabiting” them with various deities and demons, rulers of different astral and material zones. Designed to teach the disciples, these mandalas show navigation principles in the ocean of life that play with cosmopsychic forces. Those advanced in this pictographic science could become their own universe with an ontological structure of their own. In essence, these mandalas do not differ from the Pythagorean digital codes for interacting consciousness with matter. As much as the Eastern Mandalas differ from the Western symbols, they are iconographic signs in the allegorical ritual of passing through the familiar circles of *Inferno, Purgatorio,* and *Paradiso,* picturesquely envisioned by Dante. The path through them has always been and will be unique and personal, but its archetypal structure remains intact for everyone trespassing.

Triskelion © 1991, photos in aluminum construction, pencil shading, diameter 122 cm

The celestial hierarchy of harmonies makes a ranking of different unities subdivided into other orders of unities. These symphonic arrangements are reflected in fractals in nature, appear in sciences, arts, metaphysics, and poetry. Some equations exhibit unusual kaleidoscopic displays; take the case of arithmetical patterns of the relief *Triskelion*:

$$111111111^2 = 12345678987654321$$

That equation evokes certain doubts about whether it is real or just an ornate composition, so recurring and neat as it is. The nine singles raised to the second power give the

sequence of numbers (1 to 9 returning to 1). The equation itself is an arithmetical visual poetry (of statistics), particularly if we unwrap it into a full set of numbers demonstrating the multiplication process.

```
      111111111
   x
      111111111
     ----------
      111111111
     111111111
    111111111
   111111111
  111111111
 111111111
111111111
111111111
-----------------------------
12345678987654321
```

It is a picture of a life force of an army of 1's, a cappella of 99 voices in a choir of 11 rows. All this adds up to the sequence of numbers going forth and returning back. Bringing arithmetical oddities to absurdity as a projection of an impossibility, even birth and death can be coded through the game of numbers:

```
born in 123456789
died  in 987654321
--------------------------
the sum 1111111111
```

As to the classical sign of *Triskelion* (from *triskeles* or "three-legged" in Greek), it is made from warm living flesh. Written on the three bent legs, the three digital scales come from one hypothetical point, thus forming an intrinsic dynamic formation of a headed quadruple. It looks like the Greek gammadion, made of four gamma letters (T), symbolizing a solar wheel in its permanent state of rotation. This old symbol was venerated in all ancient cults, mainly known as a swastika, meaning "well-being" in the age-old Sanskrit language. This rotating swastika has four arms, all at right

angles, signifying the emanation of life, force, and movement of the mighty sun. The clockwise circling swastika, encompassing the cardinal directions, symbolizes the unfolding creation proceeding from the mystical oneness, its mysterious, hidden center. The left-hand movement brings disintegration, withdrawal, and absorption back to all that has been created. However, the so-called *fylfot* cross (full foot cross) or left-hand swastika was widely employed in the heraldry of Anglo-Saxon culture.

One more thought spells itself out as a chain reaction. The unlimited, cyclic process can be traced everywhere that surrounds us, ourselves included. The bust figure, marked with the nine singles, looks like riding a kind of "tricycle," as if riding a horse. In addition to spatial symmetry, the circle suggests some dynamic movement, reminding the old saying:

So long as a man is a man
His body is like a carriage,
His emotions are like a horse,
His soul is like a rider himself.

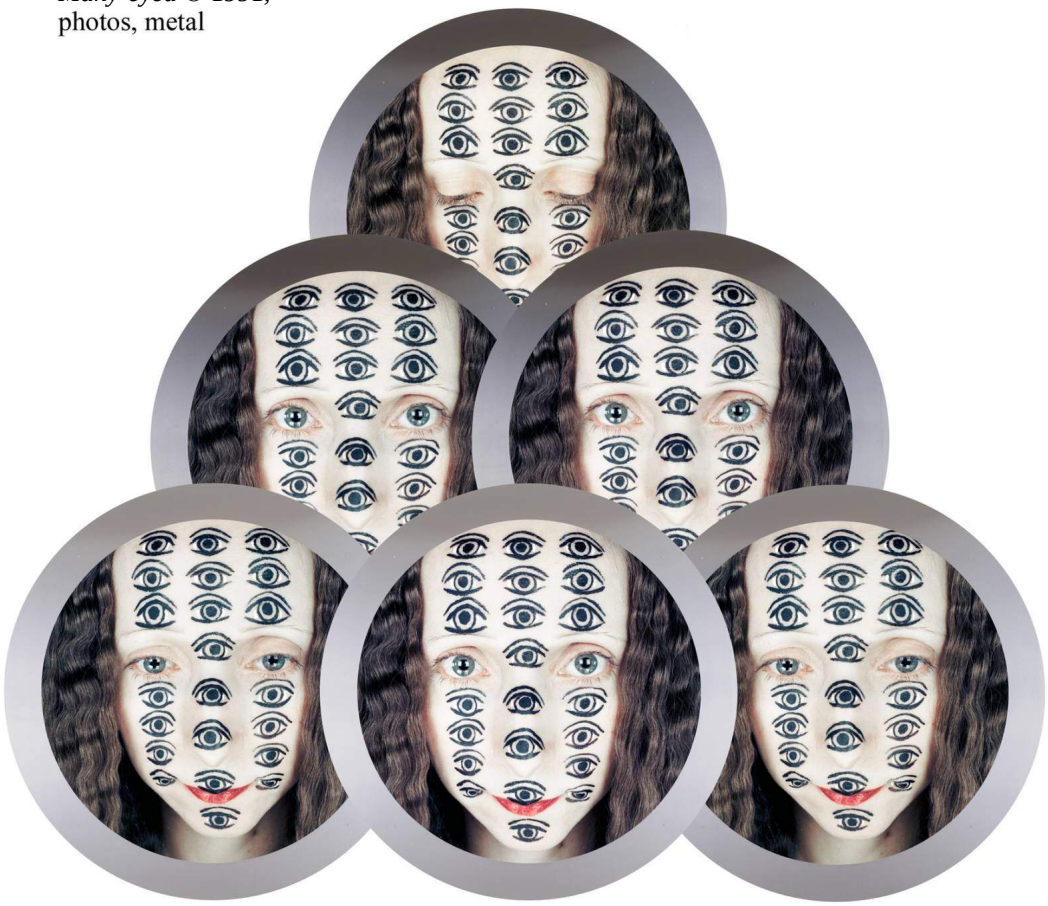
Let us move from one circle to the *Many-eyed* composition, the rounded triangle resembling the upper part of the tetraktys.

1
2 3
4 5 6

The many heads are shaped by one mind, the nucleus of the self with multi-vision. All of them might be significant in relating to the whole that is omni-linked and spreading out into all things. Plato said that we have universal heads, for they are round in imitation of the round universe, head-shaped, so to speak. Similarly, the elongated face is an oval relatively close to the form of a circle; hence, all six many-eyed faces are circled. The face is an index of the mind with its spontaneous reflex. By drawing a circle in the air, we can envision the traditional technique of concentration. Buddhists suggest staring at devices such as a circle for as long as possible to transfer it into an afterimage and dematerialize it into a pervasive, trance-inducing truth. This sounds rather enigmatic, but not in the art that can develop an afterimage of

an afterimage and transform their variety into an all-seeing, polysemous unity. Art is a medium through which various ideas, dreams, and rough matters of everyday life are transmitted, mirroring each other. This syncretism might be a product of the mind's whims, and even if so, it requires imagination and an extraordinary approach. To give one more sample of a digital phantasy, we would turn to Jean-Paul Sartre, who, in his biography, *Words* (*Les mots*), imagined himself transformed into his work, deposited in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in 25 volumes comprising 18,000 pages of text and 300 pictures, including a portrait of the author. The strange sense of unity, of including and being included simultaneously, is like living in one and in more than one mind and their many eyes.

Many-eyed © 1991,
photos, metal



Many-eyed is a multifaceted composition: 24 eyes in each of the six circles gives 144 eyes altogether. Six-folded sameness is self-divided into the circles with many visions. This visual hallucination is grouped by motionless dynamics and concentration. 144 is the square of 12. It is the number of months in a year, the signs in the Western zodiac, the Olympians in the Greek pantheon, the labors of Hercules, the tribes of Israel, and the apostles. 12 is the number of lines of equal length that form a cube. If the digits in the square of 12 are reversed, the equations turn out perfectly right:

12 x 12 = 144
21 x 21 = 441

A dozen of dozens or one gross is the number of square inches in one square foot. 144 is the 12th number in the Fibonacci numbers, where each digit is the sum of the preceding two:

0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144, 233, 377, 610...

The circumference of a circle is divisible by 360 degrees. The 144th degree of the zodiac (24 degrees of the constellation of Leo) symbolizes "the one who overcomes." On the scale of its astrological mandala, that degree indicates

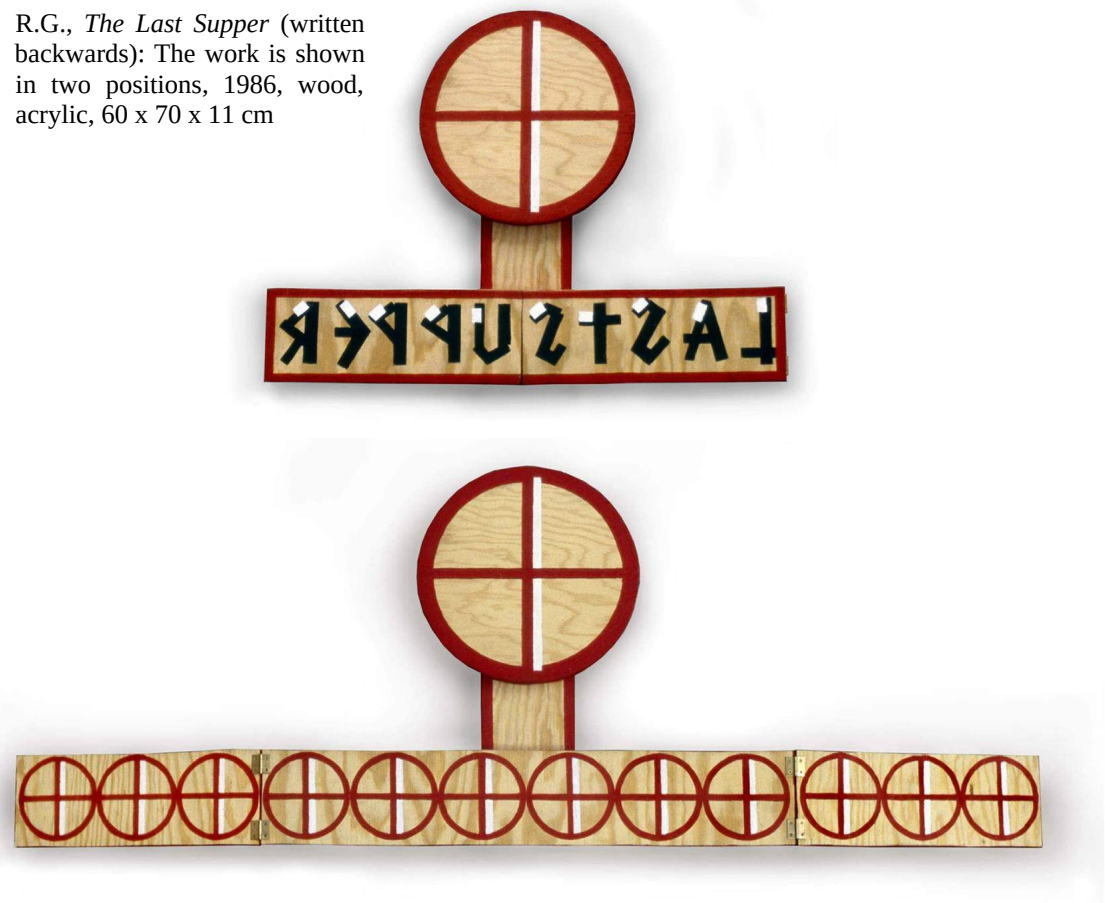
> "An interior focalization of energy and mind at the expense of all forms of outward ventures... Picture the image of a holy man in total concentration." [67]

Psalm 144 of the Book of Psalms is known as the *Benedictus Dominus*; angel number 144 brings "divine guidance."

> "...And no man could learn that [angelic] song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth" (Rev. 14:3).

Many hermetic secrets are not subject to free explanation. When phenomena invisible to the eye come under the magnifying glass of an inquisitive mind, it can give rise to hosts of false teachings, some of which grow to the size of religious movements. Knowledge that satisfies everyone has

no real value, so something will always be kept secret from people. Understanding this, Leonardo da Vinci wrote his important notes in the opposite direction. *The Last Supper* is also written backward, turning into a three-dimensional formula. The cross in the circle can serve as a paraphrase of the problem of squaring the circle. The main frontal image "stores" its small fractal copies: 12 similar heads are depicted on the outstretched arms. In a closed position, there is only one folded image when the arms are open, "embracing" all heads, one and all, together in one. We would leave the further meaning in the realm of mirror equations: some are taught how to wash the disciples' feet, others how to wash off their hands. Someone eats to live, and someone lives to eat; this is how the alter ego turns into the "altar" ego. This Supper in Russian is "secret," in Italian, "ultimate," and in English, "the last."



R.G., *The Last Supper* (written backwards): The work is shown in two positions, 1986, wood, acrylic, 60 x 70 x 11 cm

8: SQUARING THE CIRCLE

There is an ancient dilemma behind the idea of the squaring the circle; that geometric operation has baffled many mathematicians and even more theologians (who viewed the soul as a circle that occupies the square of the body). The square implies not only the world's basic arrangement but also man's constructive attempt to achieve permanence in the material world. In contrast, the permanence of life can be traced in the infinite circle and its presence in the very language of nature, with its endless circulation and orderly repetition of matrices and motion, from the orbiting of the

Bath of Hera © 1995, photos, aluminum, pencil drawing

Map © 1992, photos, metal

planets to a single raindrop. Amid the flux of nature, only changes are unchangeable and unchanging.

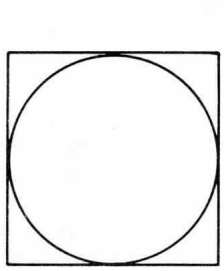
The circle is the simplest diagram of the self-enclosing and self-sufficient matrix of life. Demonstrating the cause of sameness to all things, that dynamic pattern underlies every system in nature, from celestial orders to the constitution of the atom. In that sense, the universe is just a part of a larger "multiverse." In medieval thought, the concept of God was associated with a circle, "the center of which is everywhere, and the circumference is nowhere," i.e., as an absolute center with no periphery. It might be paraphrased as follows: the center of all is in the infinity, which does not have a center. In ancient sacred architecture and in every scheme of cosmological geometry, the square and the circle are brought together and made commensurate.

Since all things share human nature, that geometrical operation frequently assumed an anthropomorphic form in our artwork. The mandala is an image of the world, so the yogis had to find it in their own bodies through meditative practices and iconographic support. This experience was interiorized through the elaborated projection technique, by

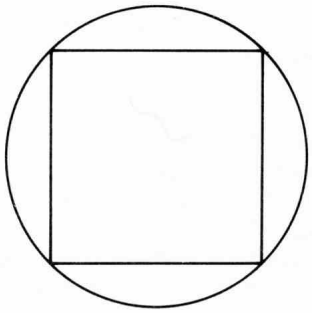
Squaring the Circle
© 2006, photo, metal

which the novice identifies himself with himself as he thinks he really is. That is what we did. We projected various forms of mandalas on our faces and bodies. Our ontological fairy tale of the square-circle operation can be briefly outlined as follows: after the ideas concerning this theme migrated on the human flesh, they obtained a new vital impulse, adding another twist to the ratio between the square forms of

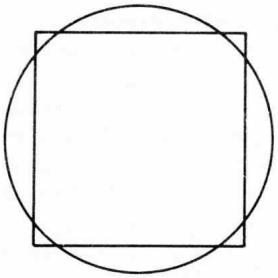
Photoreliefs and the circles of the faces. Artists and their art "suffer" the process together. In the interpretive language of visual hermeneutics, it signaled some other level of understanding, moving from a relatively passive to active metaphysical experience. Naturally, all these ideas are projected not only in art but also in real life. Relatively speaking, some of us are trying to solve the dilemma of how to square the circle, some are squaring circles of others, while the majority simply circle around their squares. Employing two geometrical figures – the circled square and the squared circle – symbolically we touched upon the *a priori* contradiction: immaterial perfection vs. material imperfection.



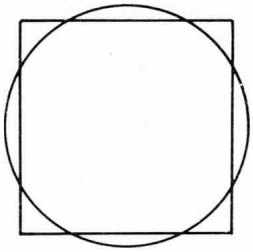
circle in square



square in circle



square and circle
with equal parameters



square and circle
with equal areas

The problem of squaring the circle, or the quadrature of the circle, was exemplified in various ways in Ancient Egypt, Sumerian culture, ancient China, and India. This mathematical riddle accompanied human civilization from its dawn.

The same meaning is concealed in the complex oriental mandala. The tantric ritual of initiation through the mandala, composed of a square and circle, is described in detail by Mircea Eliade in *Yoga, Immortality, and Freedom*:

> "At the periphery of the construction, there are four cardinal doors, defended by terrifying images called 'guardians of the doors.' Their role is twofold. On the one hand, the guardians defend consciousness from the disintegrating forces of the unconscious; on the other, they have an offensive mission... Even divinities inside the mandala sometimes have a terrifying appearance; they are the gods whom man will encounter after death, in the state of *bardo*... He [an initiate] 'realizes' the eternal process of the periodic creation and destruction

Alchemical Tree © 1995,
photo, metal

Unanswerable Question
© 1992, photo, metal

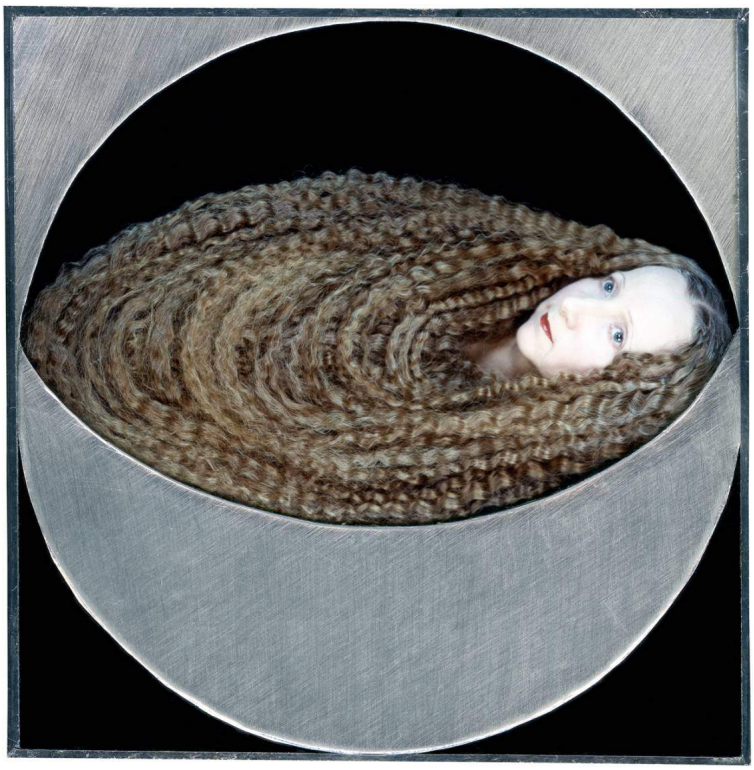
> of worlds, and this allows him to enter into the rhythms of cosmic great time to understand its emptiness. He shatters the plane of samsara and enters a transcendent plane." [68]

To summarize the above in terms of European values, a *descensus ad inferos* is followed by resurrection when the spiritual struggle with evil spirits is resolved harmoniously. In other words, going through the mandala or achieving the miracle of squaring the circle are metaphorical expressions for regeneration. That can be taken as a synonym for the perfection of the imperfect on the material level. For example, Plutarch wrote that the foundation of Rome is described as both a circle and a square. The metropolis to which all roads lead was also known as *Roma quadrata*, which implies great

human construction and an attempt at permanence. However, a deeper and more generous order is coded in the ancient puzzle of *quadratura circuli.*

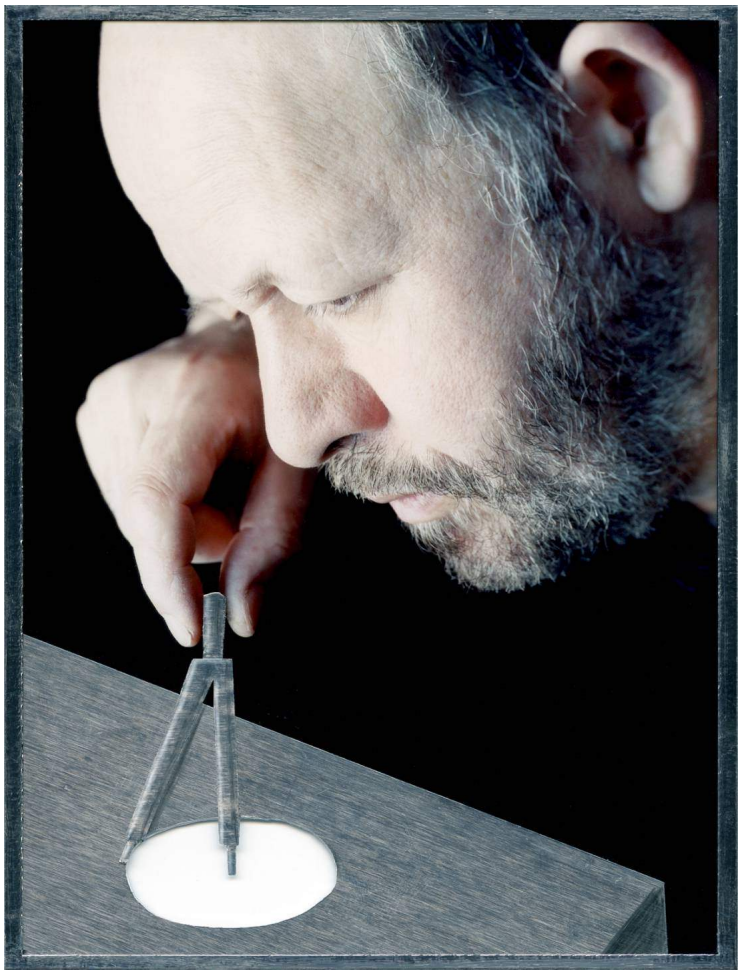
At this point, we should make a note that the Paris Academy of Sciences in 1775, and other academies a little later, announced that they would no longer attempt to solve the problem of squaring the circle, that is, to construct a square equal in area to a circle of a given radius. Since in Euclidean Geometry, the area and the circumference of a circle are functions of *Pi,* which is the ratio of the circumference to the diameter of a circle, then the proof of the transcendence of *Pi* put an end to the discussions about squaring the circle. Nevertheless, the quadrature of the circle, as proposed by ancient geometers, still attracts the attention of many researchers who refuse to believe that when mathematicians say the word "impossible," they really mean it.

Section © 2006, photo, brushed metal



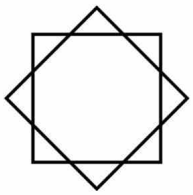
In a figurative way, the old riddle is worth thinking about, mainly how the angular quaternary structure considered imperfect can be superseded by the perfect circle with its non-differentiated wholeness. As always happens, external processes are just mirror reflections of internal development. The circles that appeared in our works in the mid-80s testified to a different stage of thinking and a desire to harmonize existence, i.e., to the process figuratively associated with the dilemma of the circle and the square. If the symbolic square of the Earth personifies our material limitations (place, time,

Divider Compass © 2005,
photo, a round hole in metal



Edge © 1990, photo, metal

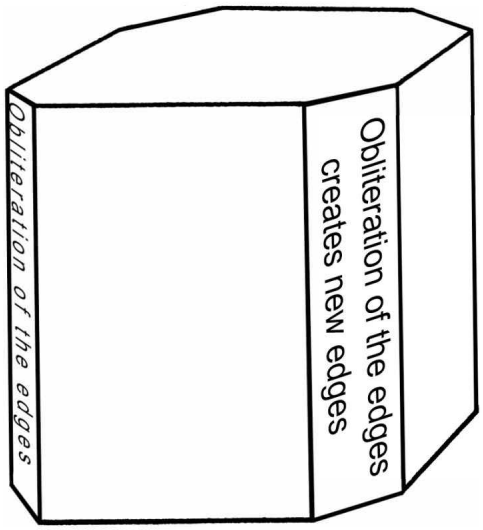
action, shape, size, etc.), then the galactic infinity of the circle has a transcendental meaning. By increasing the number of sides to the square, one enters the domain of scientific allegories, in which the finite is entwined with the infinite. You can increase the number of sides of a polygon indefinitely (the intermediate step in the intersection of the circle with the square is the octagon or 8-sided polygon with all sides equal in length and 8 corners with equal angles).



Such an operation symbolizes the gradual connection of a specific temporal reality, usually designated by a square, with a timeless, universal reality expressed by a circle. With the formation of new sides, the limited square progressively develops into a multilateral figure, approaching, in its parameters, to a circle. We are dealing here with a paradox that we already discussed earlier, namely: erasing edges leads to the formation of new edges; on the other hand, an increase in the number of sides leads to a circle, i.e., to their virtual disappearance. Perhaps this is also the basis of the principle of transformation, where the mind is used to go beyond the mind.

In the case of the trajectory of the cubes, we deal not with the idea of the squaring of the circle but the circling of the square. As a symbol of the transcendent, the circle is free from the bondage of the corners that organize the square and the cube. Here, we face the same paradox demonstrated in the early cube with the slant edges, which verbally and visually testifies: “Obliteration of the edges creates new edges.” Yet, suppose we follow the process of obliteration further. In that case, we might come to another challenge: increasing the

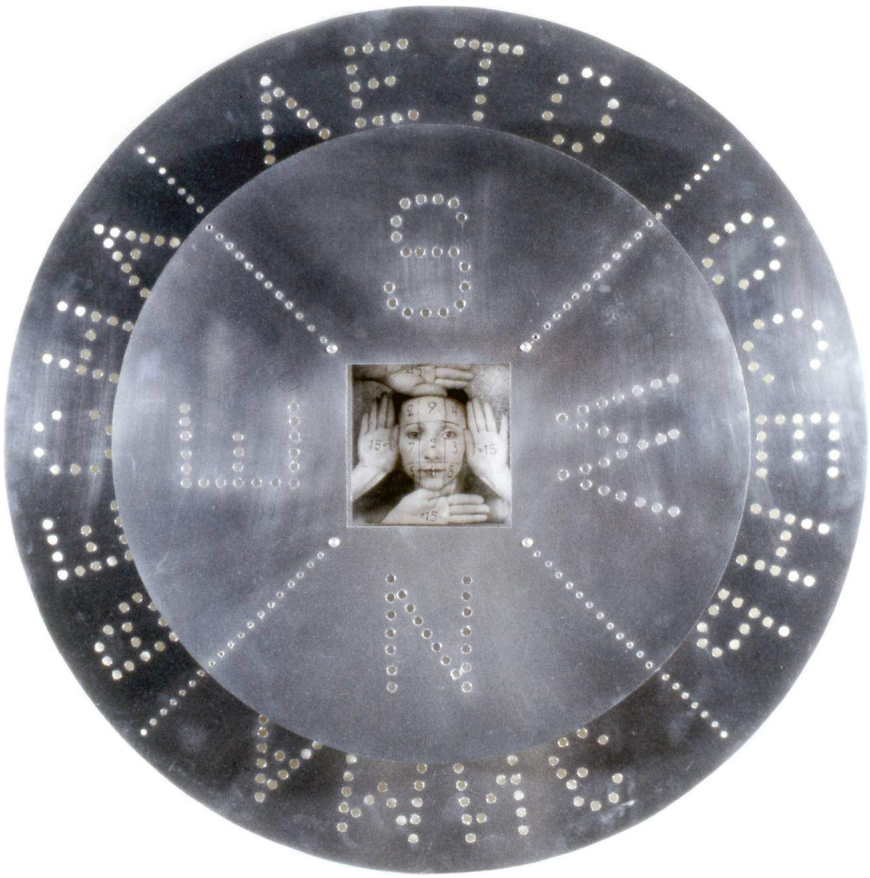
R. G., *Obliteration of the Edges*,
1974, cardboard, paper, fabric, 8 cm^3



number of sides of the polygon leads towards the circle, that is, to the obliteration of its sides, per se. The scientists, who frequently came to our apartment in Moscow as if to a gallery in the 70th, were naturally inclined towards intellectualizing the cubes. One of the discussions that stands out in our memory concers the geometrical proof of the illogicality of the Soviet slogan that reads, "Obliteration of edges between town and village." Despite the slogan, the gap between them was gradually increasing. This mismatch was presented theoretically in the cubic language: each slanted edge of the red cube indicates that "Obliteration of the edges creates new edges."

The magic square in the circle introduces a shade of concreteness into the idea of the synthesis between the general

The Globe © 2009, photos, metal

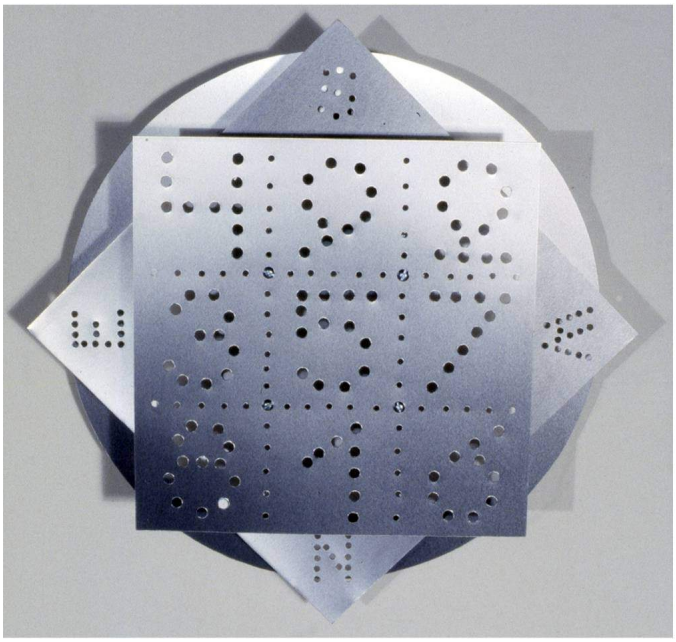


V. G., *Round Magic Square*, 1987, b/w photo, aluminum, punched letters with the four seasons denominated in Russian, 61 x 61 x 8 cm

and the particular, as well as the higher and the lower (above and below), which is characteristic of squaring the circle. In symbolic logic, it is one of the ways to merge the infinite with its finite expression. *Round Magic Square* – encompassing the four cardinal points and the four seasons – was literally "physiognomized." The face added somewhat mystifying deepness to its polished symmetry, for the face is the psychological center of this work, a focus that emblematically enlivens the object and its static features. For the ancient Chinese, a square in a circle hypothetically symbolized a map of the world representing the unity of space and time; even old coins used in everyday life had a square cut out in the

center of the coins' circle. The circle in them is Heaven, and the square is Earth, thus symbolizing their union, yin and yang, and, by analogy, the perfect man. In these configurations, Confucians saw the correct proportion of all things, including ethics, for proper behavior attracts benevolent forces from space. That did not at all contradict the ideas of the ancient Greeks, who, in their own way, saw arithmetic harmony in similar square-circle figures. The same rules can be applied to the sphere of art. The symbols, after all, are not the property of one culture or a certain period; they dominate all mankind.

V.G., *Magic Square in a Square*,
1988, aluminum, 38 x 38 x 12 cm



Many metal reliefs depict the square and the circle; *Magic Square in a Square*, par excellence, alludes to both the mandala and the dilemma of squaring the circle. Aside from its mathematical property, this classical problem is identified with the metaphoric expression for possible regeneration in

many esoteric teachings. It contains and reconciles all oppositions, including time and space, universal and individual, spiritual and physical, sacred and profane, Heaven and Earth – the circle and the square. Everything in the universe appears to be in motion because something else is moving and causing to move.

The simplest basic form of the mandala is a division of the circle, the quadrant, and, as in our case, the cross. Based on the abbreviation for "I owe you," the composition of *IOU* depicts an intimate round table for two as the "quadrature of the circle." The central "O" is the androgynous zero point between the plus and the minus, between masculine and fem-

IOU © 1989, photos, metal

inine dynamic symmetry. It is maintained through the perpetual interchange that unites by dividing and gives by taking. In Buddhism, the woman symbolizes the tranquil void, while the man is energy, skill, or compassionate activity. In Hinduism, she is primal energy, while he is the undifferentiating absolute that is awakened by feminine primal energy. The Ancient Egyptian god Horus of the two eyes, a child of Isis and Osiris (the sun and the moon), unites the opposites in one being in their *hieros gamos* (sacred marriage, Grk.). The infinite self conceives within itself the duality of oneself and the other, for each psyche, conscious and unconscious, is incomplete without the other. The union of "sun" and "moon" must be consummated in the mystic's

Sun – Moon © 1993, photo, metal

own mind, conceiving within itself the duality of oneself and the other. The prime nature of the soul is androgynous in the analogy to angels, while in physical life, it is either male or female. The single center of gravity of two is described in the myths of the androgynies that Plato attributed to Aristophanes. Initially, male and female components were one, but cut in half, each of them started to seek the lost half of oneself to fuse again. Uniting the aesthetical and the mystical, we arrived at an androgynous equilibrium with the help of art, using psychoanalysis in reverse rather than directly.

I'AMNESS and YOUARENESS FUSE,
leaving the red questions:

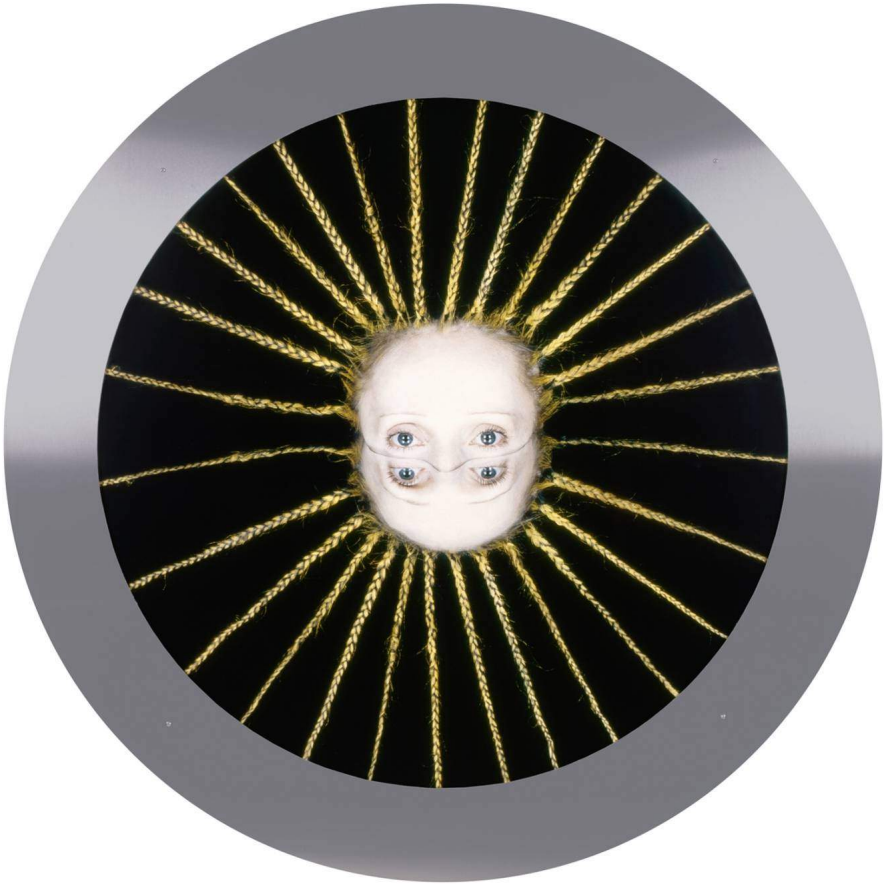
AMPLITUDE?	Am I you?
FAMILY?	Am I?
I'M-A-NATION?	I am?

One becomes the other syzygy. The two are one, yet unconscious of being one; both are inseparable, yet are ever separated. The wholeness of the psychological androgyny and the mystic's identity of the inner and the outer also can correspond to the square-circle figure. Its geometric operation is to draw the heavenly circle together with the earthly square and harmonize them by giving them an equal perimeter. In metaphysical understanding, the circle with the square is Heaven and Earth connected, presupposing each other like time and space. In many religious temples, the spherical form of Heaven is integrated into the rectangular form of Earth. For Plato, the circle is a moving image of the immovable eternity; it also moves Heaven, revolving around the fixed square of Earth. In an occult expression, the divine idea, indicated by the all-counting circle, manifests in the human soul and body symbolized by a square. The square is a quaternary of the four mutually opposite elements and their struggle, while the circle signifies their reduction to unity. "The One born of the Four is the *Quinta Essentia*," wrote C.G. Jung in *Misterium Conunctionis.*[69] Focusing the rays of our thoughts on this mysterious subject, we practiced art like music that only we can hear, but others could see what we composed.

9: THE QUINTESSENCE

Each worthwhile individual, thrown upon his own resources in his creative or some other intensive pursuit, perpetually reintegrates the objective key ideas through auxiliary rounds of his intuitive understanding. Geometrically speaking, one is spiraling and circling closer and closer to one's source. We go on until experience gives us some touchstone by which we can judge its values. All this contributed to the development of our interest in the idea of quintessence, which, among others, is a divine component in man released from the quaternary formation. The quintessence or ether, freed from

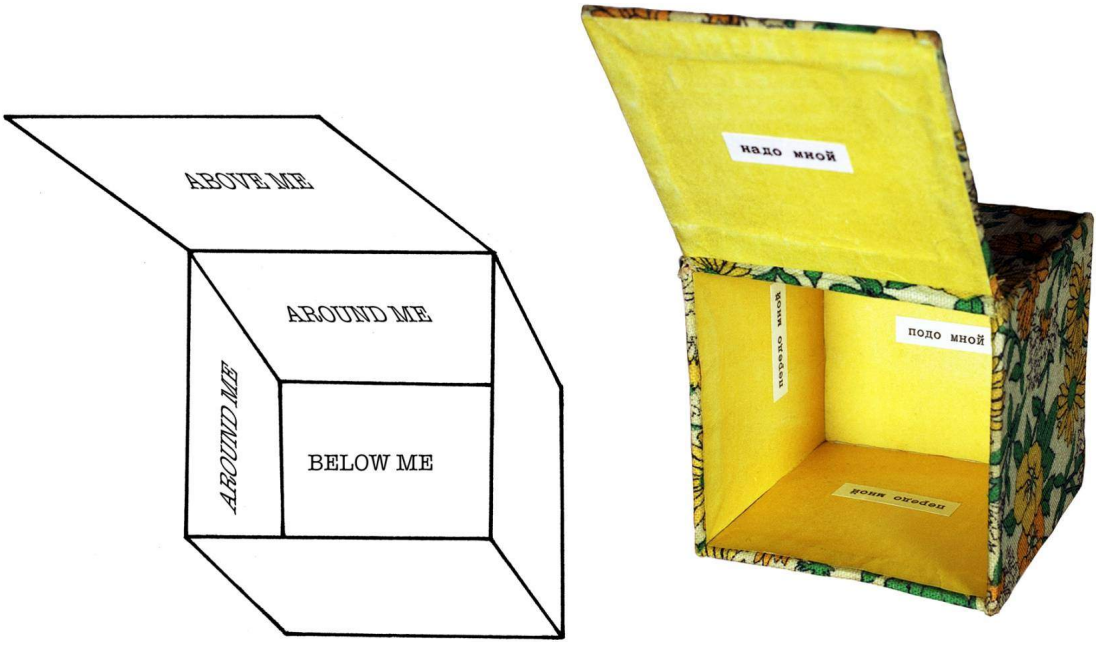
Sunrise © 1990-92, photo, stainless steel, diam. 122 cm



the weight of the earth, holds the central secret of the four other forces, for the whole comprises parts, and the parts constitute the whole. The central power is not subject to perception, whereas its effects are. All animate and inanimate life is rotating in and out, yet it is fixed like the spokes of the wheel. In search of realization, the yogis, mystics, and other anchorites tried to affiliate their consciousness with that center, turning over their lives, aphoristically speaking, from without to within. Yet, it is not a matter of will, but rather some mysterious coincidence or "at-one-ness," when one is able to hit the target without much targeting, when even non-action acts and produces effects.

Metal Glove © 2009, photo,
metal, 91.5 x 91.5 x 6.5 cm

If we accept that the universe is the outcome and development of one Grand Thought, all is coordinated according to the law of correspondence. Being a fractal of the Whole, the human mind participates in the overall process – he mind forms the world. The mind's wheel seems to be sped by our own free will. It might be so, yet not without reservations; according to Schopenhauer, we may have free will, but not the freedom to use it. Nevertheless, the human intellect can become a point of reflection for the universal law by reabsorbing the world of phenomena into the world of mind and vice versa.



R.G., *Quintessence*,1974, cardboard, paper, fabric, 8 cm^3

The cube *Quintessence* represents an "extract" of the four elements. In the cultural heritage of the past, the cubic body was considered a symbol of material substance with its gravity in the tangible world, where other hidden creative forces also operate. In this conceptual object, we hear only the voice in the first person that determines its location in space: "above me," "below me," and "in front of me," repeated four times, like an invocation. This voice is articu-

lated not by the tongue but by the projected inscriptions located respectively on each surrounding wall of that cubic space, but the entity to which this voice belongs is invisible. This inner voice testifies to an intangible dimension, although it "sounds out" in this quite tangible cube. In the Hellenic tradition, its dimensional coordinates correspond to the four primary elements from which the universe is symbolically composed. Under certain conditions, earth, water, fire, and air lead to the formation of a new fifth element – their quintessence or ether. Like a lemon squeezed into its essence, these four elements are sublimated into their invisible substance, which is the most perfect of them. Thus, the quintessence is always hidden within the material factor, exemplified by this three-dimensional cubic poem. We only hear a quintessential voice, like the sound of an Aeolian harp, extracted by a breath of wind without any musician. In a

Air, Fire, Water, and Earth © 1990

poetic sense, quintessence is the voice of consciousness, which a priori knows the laws of time and space in which we all are set, like in this cube.

There's an ultimate inclusive source of life, which contains all our lives as the *sumum bonum.* That point is everywhere and in every "when," even if it's seen from one or another perspective. In reality, life is subjective and objective at all levels. What this means in terms of humanity is that the mind's identity is more faithfully integrated within the supreme identity of being when the ego ceases colonizing consciousness. This is difficult to grasp, and yet it could be true. However, in the square circle of life, it is easy to make truth itself the source of error when

moving from one heaven to another hell and vice versa
hell heaven

As always, art is a valuable instrument for revealing the path to higher intuition, which is able to operate like a metaphysical telescope through which one can see to infinity. Thinking along those lines, Nietzsche anticipated the advent of the "artistic Socrates." [70] The syncretism of the mental and the aesthetic seems to hold the key to one of the many secrets of quintessence, the tapping of which remains mainly a riddle until one personally obtains it. Perhaps this may be why Socrates himself admitted that he knew nothing. As for us, we don't even know whether we know or not. It is worth mentioning here that man's ever-changing forms of insight are not insight itself.

Dodecahedron © 2008, photo,
brushed metal, 96 x 89 cm

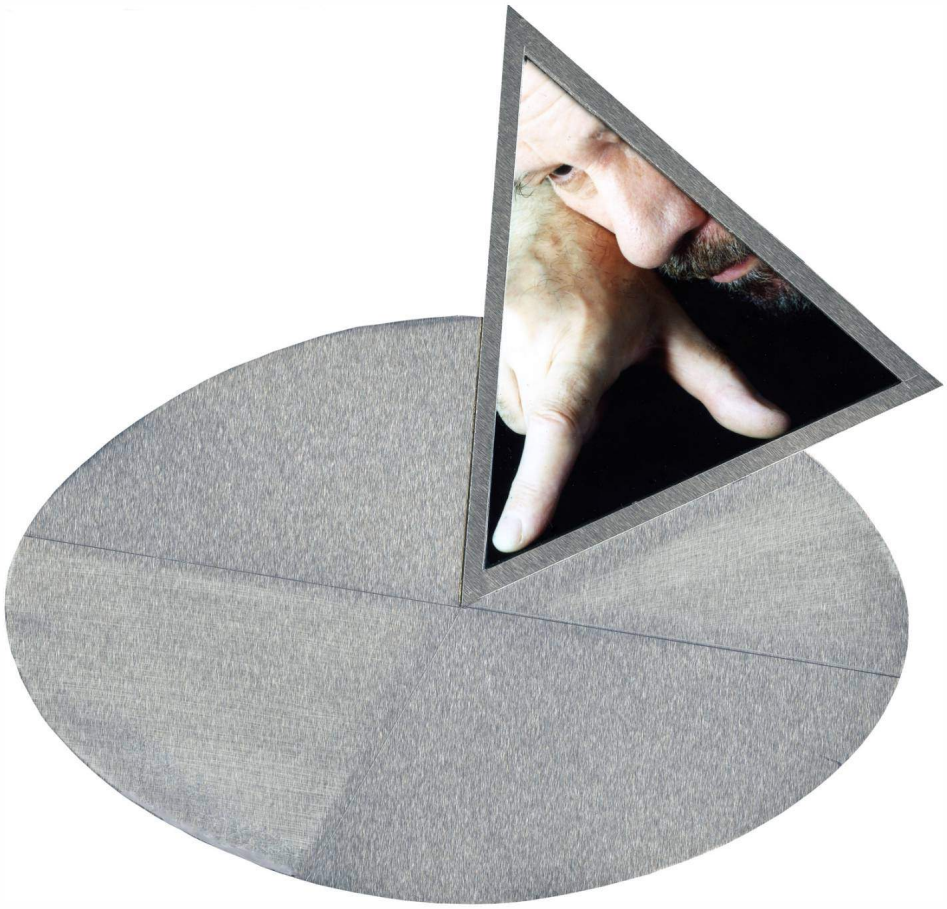
Many of our concentric metal constructions in the *Flat Solids* series are built around centralized images, like *Dodecahedron* or *Metal Glove.* One of the five sacred Platonic solids, *Dodecahedron* presents the idea of integrity rather vividly. It consists of 12 pentagons, and the photograph is inserted into the window of one of them. A close-up of the face metaphorically connects the geometric concept of the universe with the individual principle, the supersensible with the sensible, and the sensual. Centralizing the architectonics of this *Photorelief,* a knot of wire is tied on the index finger, which connects the five corners of the pentagon. As is known, the dodecahedron is a symbol of ether, a non-molecular form

of ultimate substance, *akasha* (universal etheric field, Skrt.), and the quintessence or the power underlying the other four elements. It has no apparent physical manifestation yet permeates all layers of existence: the latent unconscious, subconscious, conscious, and superconscious. The latter contains everything we have ever learned, not only in this life but also the "casts" of prior incarnations.

VIVID mystery of FIVE

Everything in life seems to be united within the space-time continuum emanating out of some sacral center, to which the human soul continually aspires, whether it knows it or not. Having neither beginning nor end, that focal point cuts

Triangle © 2001, photo, metal



Sector © 2008, photo, brushed metal

through the entire universe. Each of its expressions might be activated in the luminous center of human consciousness.

> "As all the spokes are connected both with the hub and with the rim, so all creatures, all Gods, all worlds, all organs are bound together in that Self," reads the Upanishad.[71]

Following this line, we figuratively entered the world of picture language dense with information, already mingling on the horizon of our future understanding. This aesthetic biosphere no longer resembled the world of everyday consciousness. Always in search of deeply felt images as focal

points of our poetic, perhaps even mystical strain between ideas and their representations in art, we began accepting questions as answers, not only vice versa. Call it psychophysical drama in Zen style. Seemingly, all entered the state of transformation together with us: things played the role of symbols, and symbols became thoughts, radiating inside out. Far from the mood of austere rectitude, we tried to make a contemplative art with a simple presence, figuring out what happens without knowing how. Creative folks constitute themselves as a process by which they work, and in working, they create. Art is an attempt to step inside the self, an outsider of its time.

Centralizer © 2009,
photo, brushed metal

Evaporation © 2008,
photo, brushed metal

Physical reality is a consequence of spiritual reality, which, unlike the former, is not limited by either space or time. Objective universalism cannot be separated from its subjective manifestation. Böhme said more radically on this subject, summing up his experiences of visions in a theological concept: "God is nearer to man than his bestial body." [72] "Corruptible body presses down the soul," states Wisdom of Solomon (9:15). The boundaries of the world of matter and the fields of consciousness are arbitrary. Indeed, there has to be a door between them. The moment when the psychosomatic "chaos" is reduced and the mind does not wander, something may be revealed. Open-mindedness is limitless if

it is able to stay open, attaining its psychic potential to operate in consonance with this world. Maybe we ought to engage not only the mind but also the second vision or the sixth sense to make one step beyond the routine participation in the mundane life. Can we use our minds to go beyond the mind? This “algebraic” question lines up with our personal idiom that speaks in hidden terms. Here we leave the pictorial symbolism and stand on the threshold of the verbal absurdity that is inconsistent with common sense but consistent with a deeper meaning.

Picking out the simplest ideas, we use them with the oddest twists, revitalizing them with the spectator’s interest in their picturesqueness, fanciful like an echo in the ether (upper air, Grk.). Imagine you hear an echo in a poetic mood

Retort © 1998, photo, metal, cutout

Echo © 1995/2006, photo, metal

as a reverberation of invisible steps that have come by and by into your life. In the visual remodeling of that phenomenon, our *Echo* reverses the image as if it reverses the sound. When yogis try to open the *Vishuddha chakra*, associated with the thyroid gland and the sound, they meditate on the echo. As it is stated in the old Tibetan sutra:

> "Practicing thus, you will soon realize that all words, pleasant and unpleasant, are illusory as the echoes themselves." [73]

With the opening of this *chakra*, the aspirant steps beyond the world of concepts and receives the ability to use "the spoken word of truth." Applying this idea to the visual world, all the images, pleasant and unpleasant, are also illusory, as are the

echoes; understanding this helps one gain the ability to envision truth.

We try to convey messages through subtle humor, switching to paradoxical propositions when the rational mind reaches its limit. Nature itself is full of magical tricks. For example, in the case of the so-called paradoxical frog, the adult is less than one-third the size of its tadpole and can serve as a model for human society. Why not? Hasn't it been stressed in different scriptures that those who wish to become wise must be like children? Of course, it's difficult to find among the learned those who are willing to undertake such a feat. We tend to express paradoxical elements rather decidedly so that they can produce a constructive and uplifting effect, serving thus as an appendix to reality and, most importantly, the metaphysical truth.

Quintessence is also known as a philosopher's stone or *Lapis Philosophorum,* the stone of immortality, which Böhme associated with the "fifth element," producing vivific light. We have chosen stones as the most enduring items in nature, the most stable, immobile, and inanimate forms of matter. In the mass society stressed with acute depersonalization syndrome and the glorification of insignificant characters, we created personified mythological destinies for these stones in a string of 160 meta-conscious archetypes. Here are some of them:

1 was used as a coin in 1250 B.C.
69 cornerstone
72 pleasant to touch
73 leads a double life
75 lives in a different dimension since 104 A.D.
76 a geologist
79 can only recall his marriage with #80 in 30, 981 B.C.
81 died in 1897 A.D.
85 twin of #86
99 is a part of Sisyphus' stone
100 a petrified eye
124 is lost without further notice
126 is experiencing spiritual uplift for the last 259, 000 years
127-160 have a collective biography...

Stones, 1977, 160 stones, 62 cards, cardboard, fabric, box 24.7 x 16.3 x 9.5 cm. One side of each card is written in Russian, the other is in English. Collection of the Guggenheim Museum, New York

What degree of the knowledge of truth can be buried in the coarse world of outward facts, forms, and destinies in our reality, including the destinies of rolling stones? The allegorical form of art can train and possibly awaken the mind with its piercing glimpse into the inexplicable and explain it from another point of view, or make it acceptable just like this. Zen teachers used bemusing hokku for that purpose. We used stones. The seemingly self-contradicting device of paradox carries not only a joke but a possible inner truth. It would be better to let St. Augustine speak on that occasion:

> "What a man loves, a man is. If he loves a stone, he is a stone; if he loves a man, he is a man. If he loves God –

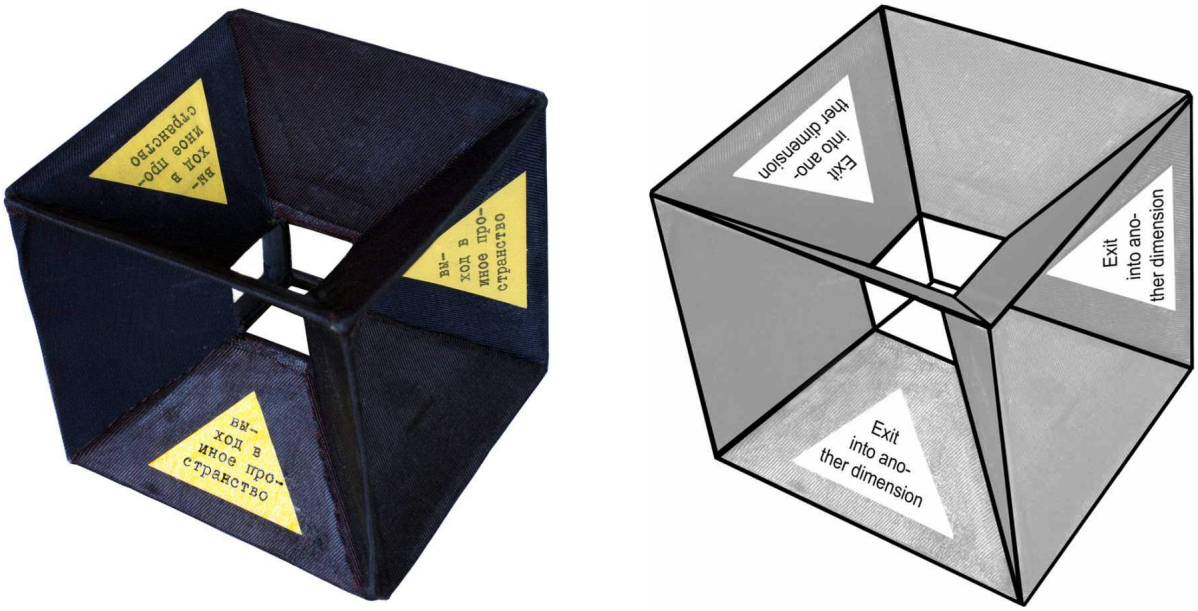
> now I dare say no more: if I were to say that he is God, you might stone me." [74]

Let us turn to the concepts of spiritual realization equated to quintessence as understood in the Orient. There is the yogic technique of internalized concentration until consciousness is fixed on "nothing" and becomes identical with the "immaterial real," in which there is no subject-object distinction. Rational non-knowledge cannot be put into words but is the essence of knowledge when the questioner, the question, and the questioned are one, as stated in Vedanta.

> The Indian Buddhist Naropa was considered to "become altogether non-dual; at the semblance of his death, he prepared to enter the indestructible union of being-as-such with being-oneself, of mother with child, of light with light." [75]

On the verge of the supreme insight, one feels an "awareness of a totality and awareness of nothing" or finds oneself in "a pure state of being," to employ the yogic terms. This is the exact point of transcendence, for it is here that life's materiality is exchanged for nowhere's bliss. This awareness is also the universal reality. In astral travel, yogis achieve a state of contemplation in which their consciousness is transferred to their etheric bodies. It has been described variously: as the fourth dimension, merging into a Higher Being, or reaching *samadhi*, an utterly absorptive contemplation of the Absolute. Internalization of the external and exteriorization of the internal give birth to a singularized universal being in the constant renewal of one's absence. There is some similarity between tricky Eastern ideas and modern-day scientific concepts.

The cubic concept *Exit into Another Dimension* looks like an intuitional model of "tetra space." Hinting at another ordinarily inaccessible exit, each side of the cube bears the same direction: "exit into another dimension," leading to the same central hole, an empty, ethereal center, uniting all possible entrances and exits in a given hypercube. Invisible from our dimension and unreachable by ordinary consciousness, this center is a perpetual door that exists everywhere and every "when" in both spatial and temporal meaning. This



R.G., *Exit into Another Dimension* is written on each side leading to the same central hole, 1974, cardboard, paper, fabric, each side of the cube is 8 cm, collection of Anton Kozlov, Moscow

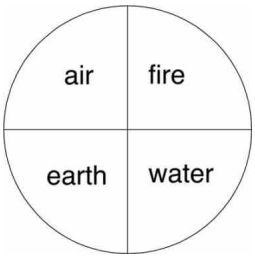
door is perpetually open, but hard to find. Who can be sure that this point is safe? Given that macro- and microstructures are interconnected, this cube represents a kind of mini-architecture for a polymorphic entrance to another dimension that can serve as both a rabbit hole for Lewis Carroll's Alice and an intergalactic *Einstein-Rosen-Podolsky Bridge.* At such a zero point, matter is transformed into an immaterial state; here, the vital forces of our dimension are sublimated into their invisible center – into their quintessence as in the cube with this very title discussed before. Its quintessential projections are expressed subjectively, while this black hypercube presents an entirely objective view: all possible exits virtually lead to the zero dimension, which has no real width, height, or length – a naked singularity. The consciousness must pass through the walls, ceiling, and floor of our third-dimensional thinking and make a "leap out" using intuition.

Level © 1991/2006,
photos, metal, pencil

All *Photoreliefs* are geometrically proportional, guided by the balance in art and the art of balance. In the round relief *Level*, a cross inscribed in a metal circle turns into a living body. Inserted into its centrifugal configuration, the pacing "cross-figure" brings the opposing currents into focus and equilibrium. Human proportions align with the pivotal palindrome "level," whose meaning is uniquely homological to its visual form, aestheticizing the same semantics. When "placed" on the cross, the word reads the same from all four sides. The center of the head, which unites all vectors in this composition, becomes the pivot or the gate through which the supreme force enters into its control, stimulating the breakthrough into the communicating vision with the splendor

hidden in life. This pivot or the vertex is marked with the twenty-second letter of the English alphabet, "V," a conventional sign for victory, and the Roman number 5, numerologically associated with the fifth element or quintessence. Parenthetically, this is also the first letter of the artist's name.

The rhythm of the composition follows the architectural structure of the cross-domed basilica with its geometrically built-in relationship of circle and cross. In addition to the religious significance of the cross, its quaternary complex also prevails in the nature of life, its spatial orientation and the four seasons.



The four classical elements are mythologized in the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, the four evangelists, the four suits of the Tarot, etc. In the compass relief *Level*, the left foot has sunk into the world of actuality, the ordeal of matter, while the right foot is in the air, pacing upward. Thus, the lower limbs are opposed like north and south, air and earth, spirit and body. The arms hold the horizontal line, symbolic of other duality pairs: east and west, fire and water, mind and feelings.

spirit
mind + soul
body

The principle of encompassing navigation in space is dynamic and cyclical. A cross as an axisymmetric living circle carries the sacred meaning of the foundation and the framework of all constructions in life and evokes the vision of Ezekiel, "...for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels" (1:20). It appeared as a tetramorph with four faces in the likeness of a man, put on the wheels rotating one inside the other. If the east and the west of the cross-sections of our "quadrilimbal" figure encompass man's left and right arms and their activity, the north and the south measure him from

Compass © 1989,
photo, metal

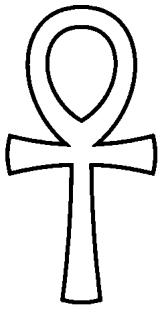
head to feet, from high intelligence to gross materialism. Even a simple compass bears the same elements of the cross with its four ends: the cold blue light of the North and the red-hot earthen tone of the South. In Eden, there is a river that divides and becomes four rivers, flowing in four directions (Gen. 2:8-14).

The four-pointed cross, as an axisymmetric living circle, appears in many alternating life confrontations: night and day, internal and external, idealism and materialism, male and female, etc. Whether it is a literal, moral, gender, or mystical meaning, the negative dialectic is used for positive purposes. Finding one's own balance presupposes a certain mastery in bearing the cross of life, neither self-identifying with it and the suffering attributed to it nor with the material

side of nature, as a servant of its blind carnal causes and effects. The composition of *Level* reduces the body down to the primary bone constituents and puts it seemingly "under the wings of the cross and under its arms," borrowing the figure of speech from the Gospel of Philip (84:30). When presenting the picture of the cross, it is impossible not to highlight its connection to a cube (symbol of matter) because the unfolded cube is an alternative form of a cross made of six squares. It can be stated otherwise: the cross is a two-dimensional development of a cube. The cross is also a hiero-gram; the earliest form of it, the Egyptian *cruz ansata* or

Egg upon Egg © 2002-05,
photo, brushed metal

ankh, is depicted with a head and generally means “life.”



The breakthrough into the communicative vision of the splendor of existence happens via the opening of this central pivot on the crown of t he head. According to the mysteries of the cross in early non-ecclesiastical tradition, the wheel with the cross carries a man into the crushing and crucifixion of his own low nature and, after the metamorphosis, carries him back into the world of perfected vision of life. A man moves through these four elements in search of his own level like a rolling stone, which in due time can be transformed into the philosopher’s stone, an imperturbable and tranquil union of all opposites. Then the V-ictorious temple of the head might be able to produce the elixir of life when the mind acquires qualities of the heart, removing the discord of the opposing forces of the terrestrial compassing cross. The ego willingly (always seems unwillingly, as shown in the scene of agony at Gethsemane) enters the realm of the power of the impersonal and suffers changes and fusions that might be called nuclear. As a result of this metamorphosis, the mind becomes capable of transmitting this power of the impersonal through itself.

Like a solar ball, the man’s “rolling head” or the mind, is thrown onto the checkered board game of life. Following the path of the scarab beetle, a sacred symbol of the sun in ancient Egypt, it begins rolling around on the horizon from the dawning East to the twilight of the West. Then it rises up to the North Pole of separation on the vertical line of the cross and falls unto the bottom of the South, buried by earth and matter. After finishing this one day, the “sun ball” of consciousness is ready to start another, but this time with the knowledge obtained from the superconscious region above the horizon and the subconscious one below. Hopefully, both

Sundial © 1991, photo, metal

of them will not be traps anymore, freezing with the inflations of emptiness or enchanting with the gross material fullness. The horizontal line of participation in worldly passions does not present an obstacle either. All is level-headed. At least, such is a picture of possibilities.

This type of knowledge cannot be communicated directly; it can only be expressed through symbolism and metaphors, which are used as a standard tool in the old scriptures. Here is an example of how the rediscovered in the time of the Renaissance hermetic text treated the related subject:

> "Because the World is a sphere, that is, a head, and above the head, there is nothing material, as beneath the feet there is nothing intellectual... But the soul of man is

> carried in this manner; the mind is in reason, reason in the soul, the soul in the spirit, the spirit in the body... Wherefore, we must be bold to say that an earthly man is a mortal God and that the Heavenly God is an immortal man." [76]

In orphic myths, the Greek Orpheus finishes as a head without the body; he lives in his head, while the decapitated head of the Egyptian goddess Isis is replaced with an artificial straw head, for she lives in her body, thus symbolizing living nature itself.

Fountain © 1995, photo, metal, Plexiglas, felt pen

Some geometric symbols can communicate no less important messages than the arcane tongue. The principle of the *coincidentia oppositorum* and its balancing unity is not a synthesis obtained by reason; therefore, it is always better to resort to symbols and art. Before assuming an anthropomorphic form, the concept of balance was explored in Rimma's visual poetry in three-dimensional form, such as in the wooden relief *Level.* This conceptual relief functions as a

R. G., *Level:* the palindrome is written on three circles, two of which can be rotated, 1988, plywood, acrylic, 44.5 x 44.5 x 7 cm

kind of equalizing device in which each symmetrical segment is on a separate circle that can be rotated independently, including the central one with the letter "V." The unbalanced forces might be easily dissimilated, which that wooden relief harbors as a possibility. Rotating the circles with letters, one can "dislevel" its symmetrical arrangement into a mess. The skill of equilibrium was known as the key to mastery over occult science and life in general. The unbal-

anced forces “cannot endure in this world, and the world cannot endure them,” as the old Kabbalistic sources stated.

Measured not only by seasonal and spatial units, our life is symbolically put on the cross of time, as envisioned in our photograph. The serpentine mind braids the vectors of *T-i-m-e Cross* with the metaphoric likeness to a snake. However murky and ambivalent, the old serpent also rules the fiery rain of fertilization. As the healing serpent cures the wounds made by the poisonous one, they are entwined on the caduceus of Hermes (Mercury for Romans), whose staff is chosen internationally for the medical logo. The crucified snake is often depicted on the alchemical drawings. Time makes it cast its skin for self-renewal.

T-i-m-e Cross © 1992, photo, metal

> "The time is out of joint. O, cursed spite
> That ever I was born to set it right!" *(Hamlet,* IL 1.185)

To paraphrase Hamlet, the image *T-i-m-e Cross* is not out of joint but is a cross on the wheel that seems to roll on and on in the perpetual becoming. Thinking of time as a device, we know that the clock repeats itself constantly because its movement is circular. The cross gives an overall impression of space rather than a sequence of time, rounded by the metal frame. It appears that this work measures time in units of space. Even if it looks strange, the similar inversion we noticed in James Joyce's *Ulysses*:

> "I am, a stride at a time. A very short space of time through very short time of space."

A switch back in time is impossible; time is irreversible, but space is not. Imagine a glimpse of momentum when the past is extended into the future through the moment of now. Something timeless is striving to reveal itself through time. There are many narrative examples of cross-current navigation in a mythological sphere, such as the pilgrimage to the Grail in the Arthurian cycle, which epitomizes the progression of consciousness through four emblematic elements wrapped around the cross. The quest itself already stirs up the opposing qualities of their quaternary. We live in a world of time on the rolling cross of its contrasting seasons.

winter
spring + autumn
summer

What would be the quintessence of the four opposing seasons? This may be an all-year-round season without dramatic changes in nature, not measured by weather patterns, yet full of adventures. Is it possible to leave the circle of the seasons and become independent of the course of time, entering, so to speak, the fifth season as a "rolling stop"? Call it an intra-dimensional leap into the moment without duration in pure existence, for time is an obstacle to eternity. The leap is not in time or anywhere, but apart from them, apart from time and space. It is like a gateway to else-

Momentum © 1996, photo, stainless steel, 227 x 200 cm, collection of Progressive Corporation

where, through the bars of which one can see splendid vistas bringing oblivion to all unworthy of posterity and making the greatest things last.

All reasonable people, adhering to the kind of wisdom that keeps them on course day-to-day, would say that they live in real-time while our insight into time is an illusion. There is no denying, but subjective deviation from the norm is not always an illusion, but rather a kind of speculative premature anachronism *(ana chron* is "against time," Grk.) when something is placed in a time when it hadn't yet existed, like a clock striking three in Shakespeare's *Julius*

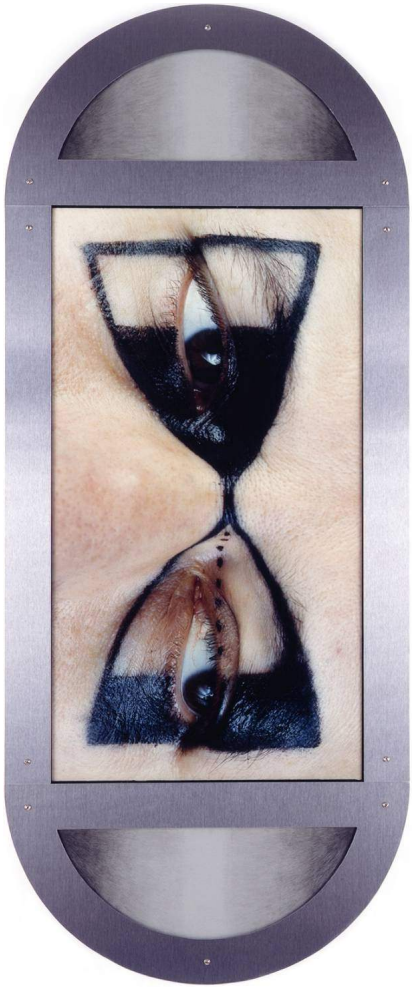
Caesar in which time mechanical clock was not yet invented. In the tales of illusion and dreams, the notion of time is distorted or simply disappears. Put differently, time stands still in the world of illusion, frozen in its self-dimension: it is everywhere now and at once.

We can have a "memory of the future," of tomorrow that is always coming but never arrives, for it becomes today upon arriving. We are "unborn tomorrow and dead yesterday," to borrow the line from Omar Khayyám's *Rubáiyát.* Though no one thinks one does not exist and perhaps sometimes wonders, "Why am I myself and not somebody else?" Marking events on the inevitable calendar may cause you to

Today © 1992, C-print in stainless steel construction, 119 x 107 cm. "Today" is part of both "tomorrow" and "yesterday."

come to logical oddities, as the above is also everywhere below, and our birthdays and "deathdays" are just formalities. As soon as spring is reborn, the winter will "redie."

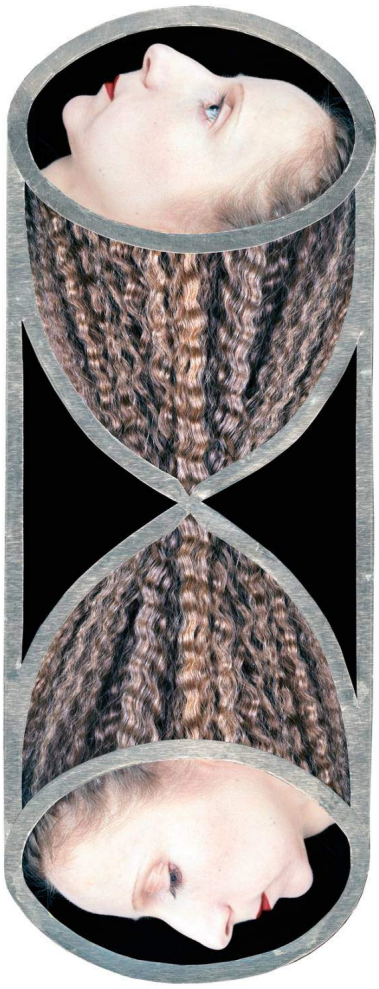
There are so many kinds of understanding of how time holds us and molds us, having so many expressions: not only



Hourglass © 1989, C-print in metal construction, pencil shading 110.5 x 45 cm

historical time but also cosmological, psychological, interior, mental, and dream time – all of them have different durations, some flying, others drugging, or even shrinking. It all depends on what sort of time one wishes to have a firm grip on. In emotional time, many years can pass as a single day, and vice versa; a single day can last years. In the ordinary

everyday time, all of which was already technically yesterday, each day is swallowed by the next, making us feel in the bones of our backs the word "past," the real and imagined, but so past tense. Here comes to mind the opening line of *The Go-between* by L.P. Hartley: "The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there."



Hourglass Loop © 1993,
photos, metal

After inhabiting a loop of time, where we experienced joy and pleasure and were assaulted by difficulties, we will be released someday, sometime. Hopefully. The cross of challenges always stirred us out of our comfort zones. The quintessence or a point of intersection of the two beams of the cross is bound to neither of the opposed sides and open to the

free circulation of energy. In ancient Greece, the bright goddess Athena held the secret science of mutual symphonies of all forces, superintending all the opposing natures of the world and composing harmony from contraries. She had the clue to the final sublimation of the earthly elements into the spirit of the quintessence. Homer called her

> "moral and divine intelligence," [meaning] "she who knows divine things better than others." [77]

Born from Zeus's head, the goddess of wisdom was a patroness of heroes and philosophers. In *Timaeus* (36 B-E), Plato says the world soul has the form and impetus of the Greek letter X (chi), called the Platonic cross and later St. Andrew's cross. Connected with the nature of living and the feminine element, the Greek X-cross of the world soul relates to the Latin †-cross associated with the masculine, mental, and rational elements. Rising from these two crosses of the four elements to the quintessence leads to freedom from them. In the language of signs mixed with visual poetry, "exit exists" can be written with two crosses, presupposing the crucifixion in two stages, as in alchemical nomenclature: feminine *albedo* and masculine *rubedo.*

E X I † E X I S †S

In actual life, it can be experienced as a series of shocks that may be beneficial in the end, changing the center of gravity from personal ego to impersonal self. That helps our 3-D mind to adapt to the ideas and facts that concern the further dimension. Perhaps the other dimension is right in the middle of our own, as an invisible quintessence of the encompassing four elements of the cross, a sacrificial bridge between time and eternity. It is not diving into metaphysical fantasies, as strange as it may sound. In fact, metaphysics and creative metaphors are meta-related *(meta* is "beyond," Grk.), suggesting concepts that abstract other concepts, alluding to things beyond regularity.

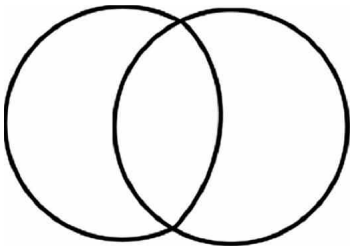
Time brings things to irreversible results and makes way for something else. We can never know what will happen exactly, and there will always be doubts. Salvation was equated to escape from time, but what if crossing over into

another world, so obviously elsewhere, one would be freed of our time but absorbed in a different time? We are bound by time, yet we are destined to have a share of eternity. The *perpetuum mobile* of time might come to an end, sucked into a time black hole. In a single moment, the passage from space-dependent timing to time-dependent spacing can lead to independence from both of them. The inner being knows no time; it exists. These thoughts present a kind of brain puzzle, but puzzles are often used as examples of creative thinking (with all eternity in the background).

Framed Egg © 2003, photo, metal, etching, pencil shading

10: THE MANDORLA

Although the border between matter and consciousness is rather arbitrary, there must be some kind of door, window, or at least a tiny gap between these two spheres. A life-giving, sovereign power seeps through it, determining all the turns of our destinies and nature as a whole. That force partly compensates for the weakness of human society and maintains a glimmer of hope and faith in a better future. Rethinking our concepts in sculptural forms of *Photoreliefs,* we tried to fuse two different layers of reality: the immediate, tangible physical, and the subtle, intangible metaphysical, into one object of art. Art has a simultaneous personal and universal function; that is what we tried to envision behind the tri-fold screen of *Two Moons.*



At the core of many philosophic systems, there is an idea of the indefinable unity that divides itself within itself to form its own self-created opposite. Better to say it duplicates itself rather than splitting in half, similar to the replication method of cells mirroring this action. The process of formation of the third transcended element is represented by the geometrical figure of the mandorla (almond, It.), not to be confused with the mandala (circle, Skrt.). The mandorla is formed by two perfect circles overlapping one another by half, while each contains half the diameter of the other. It signifies a spiritual opening or gateway out of the vulva of the fixed circles of creation. The sign, also known as the *vesica piscis* (bladder of a fish, Lat.), is, in fact, an almond-like central intersection of two overlapping circles, used to symbolize the two spheres of heaven and earth, spirit and matter.

Two Moons © 1991, photo, metal

This symbol is found in many places, so it is difficult to pinpoint when and where it originated. In Ancient Egypt, the word “end” was represented by a horizontal mandorla or a fish symbol, while the mouth of the god Ra was depicted as a vertical mandorla. Extensively, it was used in Christian art to encircle the figure of Christ, and it was also found in the art of Buddhism. The virgin birth of the Greek deity Attis, conceived by a magic almond, also relates to the mandorla. It was widely used in ancient and contemporary architecture. Several crop circles, ascribed by some to paranormal or alien origins while by others to hoaxes, represent a classical mandorla.

The mandorla carries so much meaning, and it is not our goal to explore it in-depth, considering only a few symbolic interpretations. The intermediate realm partakes of both

opposites, while human consciousness as *coincidentia oppositorum* is the mediator of:

eternal and ephemeral,
spirit and matter,
heaven and earth,
divine and human,
archetypal and personal,
unchanging and changing,
esoteric and exoteric,
life and death,
soul and body,
unity and multiplicity,
the self and the shadow,
the inner world and the outer world...

Any interaction between the feminine and masculine principles creates a potentially powerful mandorla. The two

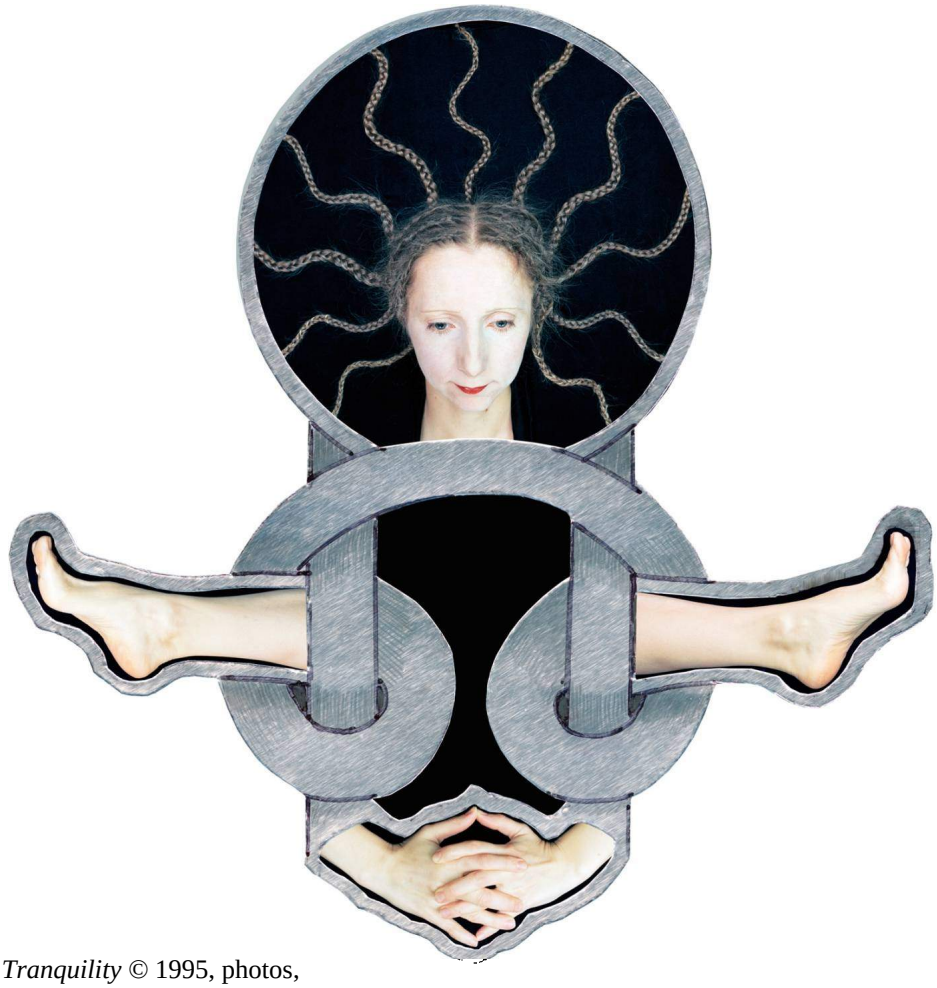
Two Rings © 1995,
photos, metal, cutout

circles have opposing energies that interlock while magnetizing each other. On the mental level, left-brain logos interlocks with right-brain mythos, presenting a new androgynous principle. Standing in the tension between two opposites long enough can give an extraordinary effect: something new can emerge. Raising the divisive tension to the great pitch leads to their harmonization and indescribable peace. The sign of

Chthonic Egg © 1995, photos, metal, pencil shading

Vesica Piscis, standing for the "womb of the universe," a single source of energy, mimics the shape of the female vagina or vulva and is therefore associated with femininity and birth. In Hinduism, this shape is called the *"yoni"* (the holy passage, Skrt.), the symbol of the Great Mother's life-giving fertility. Her creative power ignites in the almond-shaped birth canal, which can be viewed as a basic creative womb for all life. In that sense, the mandorla is a kind of cosmogram. Indeed, for Hildegard of Bingen, the mandorla symbolized the cosmos, while for St. Augustine, it represented the marriage of the divine and the human, consummated in

Braided Arms © 1994, photos, metal, pencil shading



Tranquility © 1995, photos, metal, pencil shading

"the bridal chamber" of Mary's womb.

The realm of mandorla within the two interacting circles is a kind of liminal space on the threshold where all transformations occur. It is not the sum of the two parts but a mysterious internal locus between the opposites that can open doors to immense possibilities when perception loses its usual limits and regains the freshness of childhood. Arithmetically speaking, the mandorla is not a result of two together but an independent third creation. Furthermore, the number "three" defines the volume, which formation requires triangulation above the flat duality. Hence, the tri-union (Trinity, if you wish) is a creative matrix of all 3-D

Pupa © 1992, photo,
metal, 152 x 76 cm

forms. In hermetic lore, the mandorla gives utmost protection, so everything, or rather everyone within it, is saved and sealed like an embryo against danger, with a consistent feeling of bliss and nothingness. The Taoists project the embryo on themselves, transforming themselves into embryos and sloughing off their old self as a snake sheds its old skin.

The mandorla is called a “holy passage” in the sense of a passage for the soul to the material world and vice versa.

Mandoria © 1999

Sometimes, it is piously interpreted as a gateway to heaven, the bridge space of Jesus, standing in mandorla with the glory and majesty, as He is depicted in the Transfiguration and the Ascension. In religious art, the almond-shaped aureole of light surrounds the whole iconographic figure in a way different from a halo encircling just the head. The aura symbolizes spirituality and power, showing the sacred moment transcending time and space. It is said in Psalms:

> "You are clothed with honor and majesty, who cover yourself with light as with a garment" (Ps. 104:1-2).

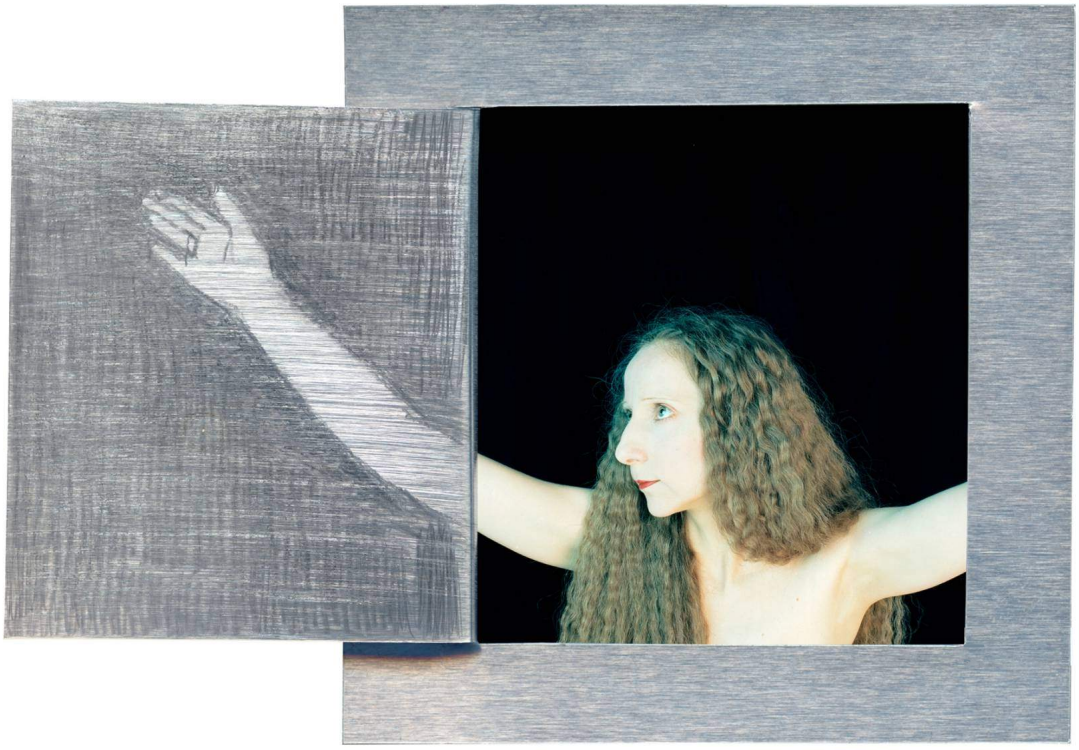
According to Jacob Böhme, when "the spirit of love becomes flesh," the soul bursts the gates of the fire wheel of the snake-husk ouroboros. He sees the escape not via the road downwards, but

> "Only upward – above all the senses – does one draw breath and strengthen life." [78]

Therefore, the different sphere, the aureole of the *mandorla* (not the circle of the *ouroboros),* surrounds the image of the transfigured soul that can see with many eyes.

The exit from Magna Mater was shown in the act of transfiguration through the perpetual sacrifice that regenerates the creative force stored in these two spheres above and below. Thus, the gates of the nature-bound clockwork of the

Opening © 1991, photo, metal, pencil shading



Arm © 2010, photo, metal, pencil drawing

ouroboros burst open. Joseph Campbell abridged this idea along the parental lineage, saying:

> "...in Orpheus and Christ, we have exactly the same archetype... they leave the Earth, a symbol of Mother, to go to the realm of the Father... You are kept in exile by your commitment to that world, and the meaning of its end is not in the literal physical aspect of it... for the world, as it was for you, has indeed ended." [79]

Operating in the outer world, one might be quite free and detached from it. Symbols, stories, and facts about the Magna Mater worldwide are indeed endless. Even though the mystery of spiritual regeneration remains dark to the finite intellect, the necessity of universal ideas, often revealed through the images of different archetypes, is indispensable

for the life of the psyche. The mandorla is a portal for the non-physical to manifest itself into the physical reality and vice versa. Incarnating as a savior "in pure love without artifice," *sol salutis* (sun of salvation, Lat.) receives power over two spheres of upper and lower worlds. Since antiquity, he was thought of as the *filius solis et lunae* (the son of the Sun and Moon, Lat.), the *filius sapientiae* (son of wisdom, Lat.); hence, in medieval art, the image of Christ uniting the heavenly and earthly began to appear in the mandorla, representing sacred moments of the Resurrection and Transfiguration. In the Apocryphon of John, we read:

> "John, John, why do you doubt, and why are you afraid? ... I am the one who is with you always. I am the father; I am the mother; I am the son" (2:9-14).

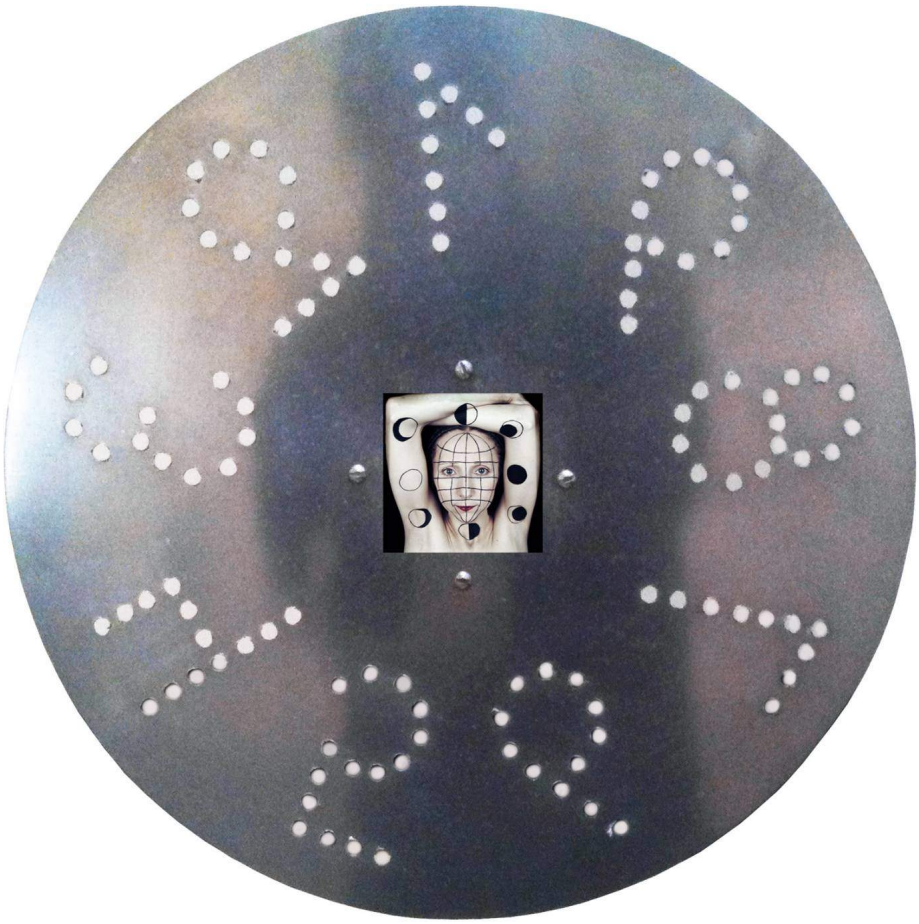
In this Gnostic poesy, Christ represents the matrix of creation as the Trinity. The eleven-century archbishop of Canterbury, St. Anselm, prayed in a rather unorthodox way:

> "Christ, my mother, you gather your chickens under your wings." [80]

The gateway to the other planets was attributed to the Moon, viewed as a funnel of the Earth, which gathers and pours out the influences of the other planets onto the sublunary sphere to which our Earth belongs. Thus, the Moon provides the link between the earthly and the celestial in the manner of a ladder, the steps of which lead up into heaven, and even more quickly, can lead us down. The Greco-Roman variations of the ladder of Jacob are told in the revealing short parables of *The Vision of Aridaeus* by Plutarch,[81] and *The Dream of Scipio* by Cicero.[82] The Indian allegory, viewed through the English mind of the Victorian period, *Dream of Ravan*, describes how, by

> "Drinking the moon's fluid of immortality descending from the brain one obtains the siddhi powers... and fixing [the mind] on the infinite moral beauty and goodness... transforms oneself to some likeness of the eternal love." [83]

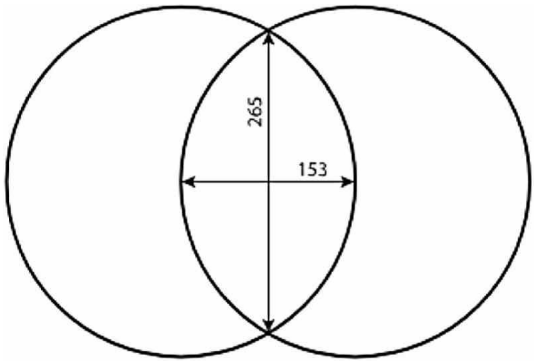
For those interested in such “transitions,” these stories can be a source of artistic delight and metaphoric information. If the capacity for rising is granted, these maps could be helpful for the pilgrimage in a much broader sense. The old



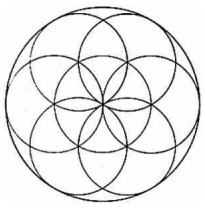
V.G., *Lunation Calendar*, 1990,
aluminum, photo, 36 x 36 x 5 cm

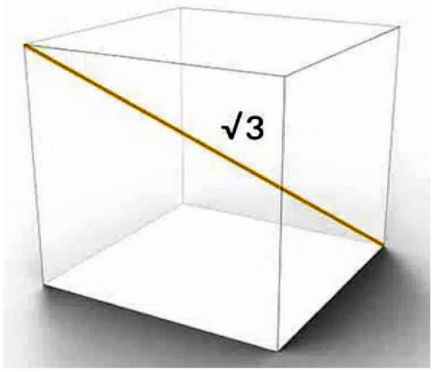
myths and rituals may point towards liberation during the long traveling that proceeds through delays in the twilight of the symbolic moon. However, people too influenced by the moon region imagine heaven in a familiar material way – everything they ever wanted to have and dreamed about on earth but did not have. It is better to keep in mind that the

moon region is marginal and diffusing. For that matter, it would be safer to be content only with the dawning glimpses; anything more could be more dangerous than helpful. It is stated in Indian scriptures that the moon's ambrosia might be life-threatening for unready or overly pragmatic mortals to drink; it can give a t aste of immortality only to those proficient in spiritual practices. Even by the titles of the books mentioned above, it is clear that the moon is associated with visions, sleep, dreams, and, consequently, nightmares. In the brief sketch concerning the moon, we give only some mythological allegories from the extensive corpus of selenic literature.



The combination of two circles of the Sun and the Moon (god and goddess) is often depicted as *Vesica Pisces* or mandorla, containing the spark of creation. Known as the "measure of fish," it has been the subject of mystical speculation among the Pythagoreans, for whom geometrical and mathematical properties were like creative living forces. The ratio of the width and length of *Vesica Pisces* is 153:265, which equals $\sqrt{3}$. The square root of 3 is 1.73205..., an irrational number similar to *Pi*, whose decimal expansion does not end.





The square root of three is also precisely the length of the diagonal of a cube. It was long ago known that $I^3 + 3^3 + 5^3 = 153$, exhibiting marvelous cross-harmony of digits. It seems the language of numbers (and art, for this matter) can be a more speculative "prefigurament" of the truth than trans-theological revelations.

It is not a coincidence that the number 153, the width of the *Vesica Pisces*, appeared in the Gospel of John as the number of miraculous fish Jesus caused to be caught. His followers could not catch anything for days, but Jesus, after His resurrection, helped them with fishing:

> "So Simon Peter went over and dragged the net ashore full of one hundred fifty-three large fish" (21:11).

The big cinematic picture is this: the sea closed up under Jesus' feet, and He walked on water, depicting an anthropomorphic parallel to what we read in the first lines of Genesis, "The spirit of God moved upon the faces of the water." To be able to walk on water means to transcend the conditions of the phenomenal world. Knowing the essence of the eternal water that does not wet His feet, the Savoir could fish human souls from the existential waters of the world. The Greek acronym for Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior is ΙΧΘΥΣ (*Ichthus*), which translates to "fish." The early Christians would make themselves known to one another by scraping into walls a contour of a fish or two lines indicating it. The miracle, known as the "Feeding of the 4,000," with seven loaves of bread and a few small fish (Mat. 15:32-39, Mark 8:1-9), could have produced a new dimension of awareness

or faith in the souls that were allowed to witness it. Such an incident of magic made its mark on our image *Loaf and Fish.* which has a focal point – a fish made out of a loaf – that is an imitation of the mandorla formed by folded fingers.

Loaf and Fish © 1996

Miraculous fishing is one of the most common features in mythology, when fish, as wondrous food, are caught through the grace of the higher forces. The fishing for souls is the motive evocative of the Orphic tradition, Christian symbols, and the Arthurian legends of the Fisher King. In the image *Salmon,* the vertical figure and the horizontal fish made from pomegranate kernels form together a cross standing in the red water gap. The solitary figure, gazing above as if pleading for grace, stands frozen in passivity in the seemingly rolling red waves. This strange scene alludes

to the mysteriously wounded *Roy Peschour*. the keeper of the Holy Grail. His heart is pierced by the mystic fish. The arcane part of this saga is that the Fisher King and his wasted land are sustained by the Grail alone.

In the image *Fish* (next page), one of the few photographic works in Russian, has some relation to water, but in its purifying meaning. The biblical phrase "The Appearance of Christ to the People" is written in different intervals, as if an unreadable riddle "appe arance ofchri sttot hepe ople." However, it is relatively readable in Russian: "reality laziness and Echrista is preordained" is written in a semicircle on the

Salmon © 1999

forehead, while a fish is drawn on the nose. That creates a certain mystery in the well-known phrase, uniting verbal and visual conundrum. If you try to convey the sacramental silence of thoughts with the help of words that strive for

Gerlovina, Berghash, Gerlovin, *Fish* © 1987

lapidary “infinity,” then visual poetry has the most suitable arsenal of means for this. Traditionally, the elements of water and earth are depicted pointing downward; hence, a fish, a symbol of water, is positioned vertically as if flowing downward. The work mythologizes not the image of Christ but rather the mystery surrounding Him, whose spiritual presence is felt in the souls but remains elusive and unfathomable. Just as the secret can be hidden behind the obvious, so the obvious can be hidden behind the secret. Many important things are revealed in contemplative silence, on the

threshold of another form of consciousness, which may seem incomprehensible to others. In addition, mystical symbols often do not need interpretation; they sow themselves in the consciousness if it is subtle enough and ready to accept them. The possibility always exists every minute of every day because we are inside that spiritual reality like fishes in the sea.

A Russian proverb says, "There is no truth in legs," although the 12th constellation of fish, Pisces, a symbol of Christ, is a ttributed to the very bottom part of the body – the feet, which the fish does not have. The feetless and lidless, like a snake, Pisces is the closing link in the chain of transformations of the entire circle of the zodiac. Finally, the fish-shaped central area formed by two overlapping circles or *Vesica Pisces* designates the Piscean Age, the period of cosmic and human evolution, so it seems is most natural to conclude.

Age of Pisces © 1989

11: THE ICON

In Eastern Orthodox icons, Christ appears in the mandorla of almond-shaped light, often at the bed of His dying mother. This type of icon is entitled *The Dormition* of the *Theotokos* (Death of the Mother of God). Generally, orthodox icons are visual works of theology made through symbolic art. Framed in the robe of solemn metal casting, our relief, *The Child*, unites liturgy, art, and life – a small iconographic profile is drawn on the real face. Often, Russian icons were put in metal *rizas* or revetments that covered practically all of them,

The Child © 1995, photo, metal, pencil shading

leaving only the faces, hands, and feet visible. Halos around the heads were indented on the sheet metal casting, often ornamented with settings of precious stones. In our version of an icon, we made a metal cutout frame, removing all background elements. The frame was done in the likeness of a robe, covering the head, and the pencil shading imitated the folding pleats.

Rooted in the old iconographic tradition, this icon is made in the manner of the genre known as *Our Lady of Tenderness*: drawing a child's head on the mother's cheek suggests great intimacy. Such face-to-face closeness shows the relationship between the two states of spiritual experience, personified in mother and child, in mutual interior confidence and affection, welling up from an inner center. In such a moment, the everyday personality does not overshadow the rare glimpse of the face of your own childlike essence. There is the Novgorodian icon from the 12th century that shows Christ holding in His hands a swaddled child, symbolizing Mary's soul. In parallel, we might cite Dante's thoughts on that "inversion" from the last canto of his *Divine Comedy, Paradiso* (33), written in the 14th century:

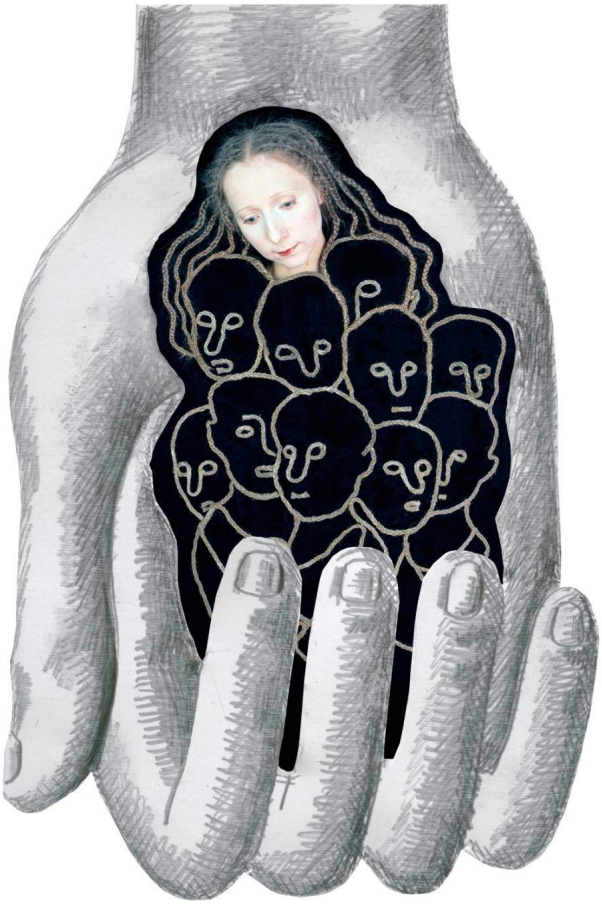
> "Thou Virgin Mother, daughter of Thy Son, humble and high beyond all other creatures" *("Vergine Madre, figlia del tuo figlio, umile e alta più che creatura*").

Devoid of realistic detailing, traditional icon paintings showed no natural source of light, no shadows that bring depth and a naturalistic mood to the composition. The expression of light was left purely to the inner sacred source of the images. The distorted proportions of compositional elements and inverted perspective contributed to the creation of the unaccustomed stillness of the iconographic world. In its supersensitive realities, the images were emblems and indexes of the sacral symbols. In the long-time tradition of pictographic languages, dating back to Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt, lofty messages were coded by intentionally disproportionate figures and distorted perspectives. The Orthodox icons can be partly credited for preserving these methods of transmitting metaphysical messages, which influenced the strict rules of iconography. The icons, in contrast to religious paintings of the West, were portative objects of ven-

eration. They were painted on the prepared wood panels, slightly curved. People displayed them not only in churches and at home but also took them along on journeys and to war. Therefore, the purpose of the icons and their devotional and intimate functions must be considered when analyzing their esthetical qualities.

The eye-catching difference between the image of the Russian Virgin Mary *(Deva Maria)* and her European Renaissance counterpart lies in their visual representation; the Eastern Orthodox women were always depicted with covered heads, keeping alive the early medieval standards of canonical art. According to this tradition, no woman can enter a church without covering her head. The same rule was

In the Hand © 1994, photo, metal, pencil shading



Dressed © 2009, photo,
brushed metal

strictly applied to the iconographic art. It did not go so far as the Muslim *burqas*, but it certainly had the influence of the Levant, modified by the Byzantium way. The hair, as an ancient symbol of inner strength, natural beauty, sensual fulfillment, and femininity in general, was never painted on the icons, which were still the leading way of artistic expression in Russia at the time of the European Age of Enlightenment. During the rule of Peter the Great, one Dutch traveler mocked Russian devotees in his diaries, calling them "baptized bears," whose faith seemed overwhelmingly excessive for the rational mind.

The traditional Russian worship of sacred womanhood expressed in the image of the Mother of God *(Bogomater*, Rus.; *Theotokos,* Grk.) has a lot of peculiarities that confirm her much deeper pre-Christian roots. We must descend "in the deepest of all depths" to glimpse her black face, the same one associated with the Black Madonna in Europe. The image *Looking Grass* alludes to this theme and might be commented as seeded in darkness and growing into light and vice versa, born of light but growing in darkness. The distinction between these two comments is by no means so secure. When our world below is filled with matter, it is fully visible, but as soon as it reaches a certain level of subtlety, it loses matter and becomes invisible. This way, the notion of darkness can be viewed differently, depending on what significance we prepare for it. The meaning of the Black Madonna (usually referring to medieval images of the Virgin

Looking Grass © 1991

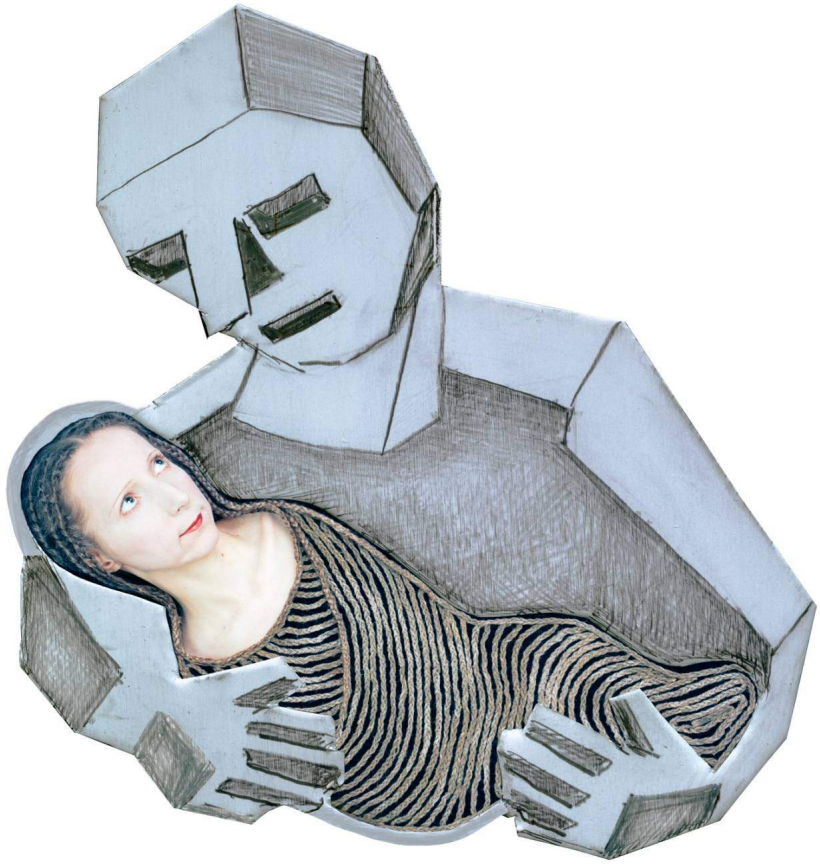
Mattter © 1989

Mary with dark or black features) may come from the Song of Songs (1:5), "I am black but beautiful" *(negra sum sed formosa*, Lat.). Still, maybe it is of much older origin, from the ancient earth goddesses, often depicted as black. In Aramaic language, "black" means "sorrowful," which was a title bestowed on the Egyptian goddess Isis, mourning the death of her husband, Osiris. The dreadful Kali from the Indian pantheon of gods is blacker than black. And the *Kali-yuga*, the present age of the world, was considered the last step of involution into binding materialism, according to the predictions in the Vedic teachings that appeared at the daybreak of our civilization. The word "matter" is transformed from *mãter* (Lat.) and mata (Skrt.), thus returning to the circuit of our theme of black mothers. Immersed in the blackness and blindness of "matter-of-fact" events, life is presided over and at the same time restrained by the solid

mãter materialis, while the rejuvenating principle of creative femininity rests in occultation. Only a certain portion of those rejuvenating energies passes a little at a time over the threshold into our consciousness.

The "biography" of our unfolding creativity would not be sufficient without directing attention to its inspirational roots, backed by reflective thinking about our background. Any national culture is like one great tree that promotes the growth of all other trees, even if they are transplanted into different soil. For that matter, the main principles of the leading art form, developed during many centuries in Russia, need to be explained in some detail, as it is only dimly known in the West. But before we touch Russian soil and its mourning deities, we would like to filter their general, multi-

The Nurse © 1995, photo, metal, pencil shading



national meaning through the poetic mind, whose vision can be more valid than any scholarly research on this subject. In Goethe's words that he entrusted to the mouth of Mephistopheles:

> "Goddesses are sublimely enthroned in solitude; about them no space, still less any time; to speak of them is embarrassing. They are the mothers! ...To reach their dwelling, you may well delve into depth into the untrodden, not-to-be-trodden; a way to the unbidden not-to-be-besought... You will see nothing in the eternally empty distance, will not hear the step you take, find nothing firm to rest upon... Descend, then I could say ascend. It's all the same" (Faust, part II, 6216-20, 6275).[84]

Sky, Sea, and Rocks © 1991,
photo, metal, pencil shading

And in this “naught” of the realm of the mothers, Faust “hopes to find the All.”

Covered from top to foot, even in her prime youth, with the infant child on her lap, the Virgin Mary often looked like an age-worn, sad woman on Orthodox icons, similar to the Pietà. The Virgin was shown in her sorrows as an opposite to her effulgence, in her mostly mournful aspect of refuge and queen of martyrs, as Mother Russia itself, in the eyes of many of her children, infused mainly with fear of God rather than His glory emphasized in Renaissance art.

> “...Earth is the Russian ‘Eternal Womanhood,’ not the celestial image of it: mother, not virgin; fertile, not pure, but black, for the best Russian soul is black... There is something impersonal and generic in her... no parallel to Athena or any other Virgin Goddess, and it seems that

Bird © 1989

> neither purity nor beauty was essential to her worship... Mother Earth is shapeless and faceless. The beauty the Russians are sensitive to is not embodied primarily in womanhood. Beauty dwells in nature. And the beauty of nature for the Russian is the embracing, the enveloping, rather than the contemplated. Man is lost in nature, unwilling to master her." [85]

Taken from *The Russian Religious Mind* by Georgy Fedotov, a founder of Russian "theological culturology," this observation emphasizes only one aspect of the feminine presence in

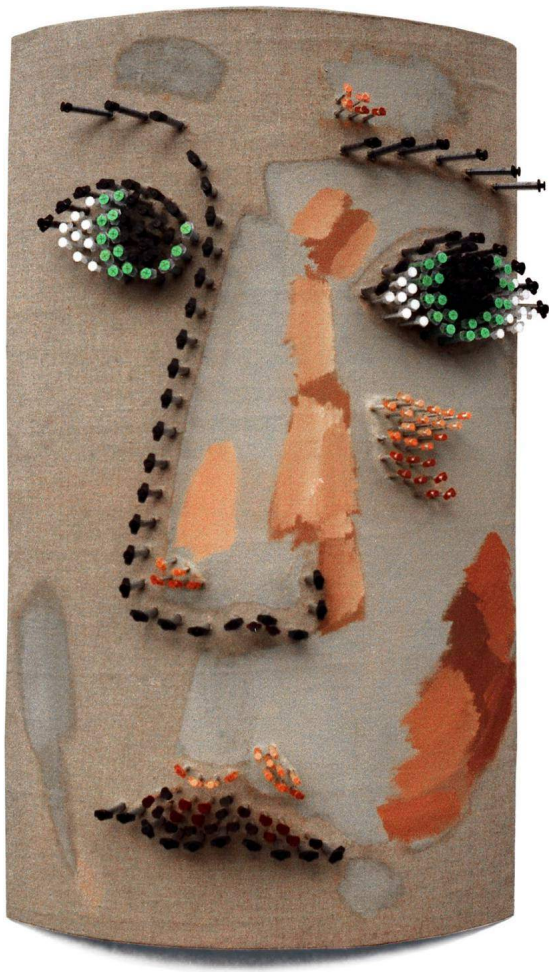
Hands © 2001

the Russian mindscape. As we mentioned before, this primordial gorging depth of her fertilizing power can be found in the formative background of any culture, disclosing her shadowy presence in the domestic customs and different forms of creativity even in the most advanced cultural milieus. Some mythologists, especially Joseph Campbell, gave detailed ac-

V.G., *The Large Icon*, 1984, mosaic from syringes, acrylic, canvas on curved homasote, 183 x 75 x 25.5 cm

counts of this ever-present fertilizing and, at the same time, tantalizing feminine images, whose actual origin lies somewhere in the Neolithic Age and whose chthonic power he eloquently favored over the graceful elevating presence of the exalted anima.

In Russian folklore, she is called "Mother Earth, the Humid," and she kept dwelling on the Slavic backdrop as elsewhere. If we accept the possibility of a celestial origin of human souls, the Earth cannot be named our mother; at best, she is our nurse, and there is a big difference between these two. All of us constantly witness how the "day-care" of her children and the beauty of the Earth in general are marred by



V.G., *The Small Icon*, 1984, mosaics from syringes, canvas on curved homasote, acrylic, 122 x 69 x 25.5 cm

the suffering on every side. She is terrene life itself, and to ease her earthly grip, one would need the assistance of another type of goddess.

Precisely, this image of the eternal feminine was domineering in the golden period of Russian literature; therefore, Dostoyevsky once called Russia "the woman clothed with the Sun." This woman of the Apocalypse, crowned with twelve stars, appears to be a personification of the divine Sophia or wisdom. Calling her the eternal soul of the world, Vladimir Solovyov, the philosopher and the poet after whom Dostoyevsky modeled his Alyosha Karamazov, wrote:

Plexus © 1999

> "The world soul is the incarnation of the divine idea, or the deification *(theosis)* of all that exists, by giving all that exists the form of an absolute organism... The divine Logos, as an active and formative energy, has the idea of total unity within itself and gives this idea to the world's soul as a determining form." [86]

The poetic, mystical vision of this world's soul as a beautiful woman recurred in his life trice. The concept of "Sophia," occupying the mediating position between the multiplicity of living beings and the absolute unity of Divinity, was continued in the further line of Russian religious philosophy. For Sergei Bulgakov, "Sophia" participated in both divine and created nature, relating the world and the Absolute; for Nicholay Lossky, she was "standing next to Christ as His closest co-worker." [87] Through her, God was manifested in all creation as the living, acting power.

East – West © 1999

Naturally, this virginal essence of spiritual knowledge also had to be reflected in Russian iconography. The canonical representation of the *Sophia All-Wisdom of God* (the generic title of these icons is *Sofia Premudrost Bozhia,* Rus.) is primarily shown by the female figure upon a throne and the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist standing from both sides. Conforming to accepted religious practice, the composition

The icon *Sophia All-Wisdom of God,* 15th cen., Annunciation Cathedral, Moscow

of these icons demonstrated four levels, each encoding a stage of sanctified attainment. The first region of spiritual exaltation was attributed to the Virgin Mary and the Baptist; the second was ruled by the enthroned Sophia; the third showed the glory of the living Christ; and the last one was the eternal realm of the Divine, often symbolized by the Word or the book surrounded by angelic forces.

The Sophia All-Wisdom always revealed herself to the wise, meaning those who have been able to overcome the

gravitation of the chthonic forces of necessity – "the realms of the mothers," devised by the same prime power of all-inclusive wisdom, transpiercing all creation. Rooted in the Gnostic concept of *Pistis Sophia* (Faith-Wisdom, Grk.), for some medieval philosophers, her wisdom meant "Word," a mental image of the creation, which pre-existed in God's mind before the actual creation took place, similarly to the Platonic concept of a metaphysical realm of ideas.

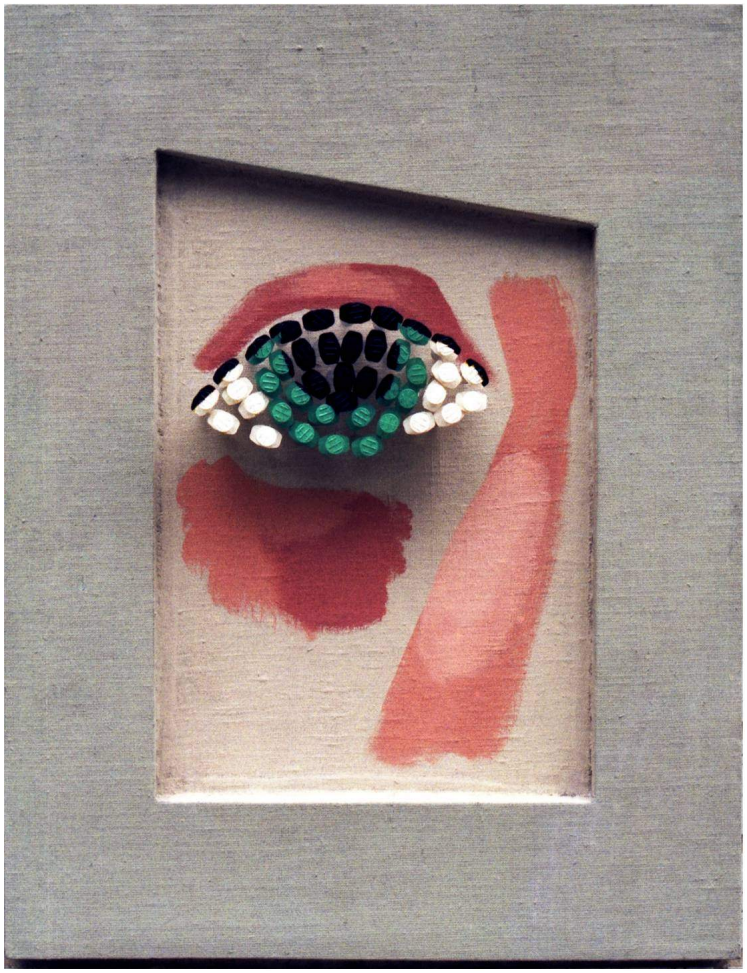
For Jacob Böhme, Sophia was the divine imagination that flowed out from wisdom, a substance in which the Holy Spirit embeds forms and shapes. She carried the feminine symbol of love in its mystical aspect because love is implicit in wisdom. Sophia was his genius, a part of himself, the ideal property of the regenerating soul called the heavenly bride. Behind the image of Sophia, this visionary philosopher and the simple shoemaker from Görlitz saw the path to "salvation in the valley of pain," the only indissoluble potentiality in the mortal environment. Being the substance of all life, the world's soul embraces and encircles the creation, showing the task and the way from the earthly ordeals whose mere substance is suffering. With this, we may break off, summarizing the whole issue with one poetic line of the conclusive sentence of *Faust* (Part II, 12104),

"The Eternal Feminine leads us upward and on."

The strict rules of iconography were equivalent to the hagiographic language of Christian Orthodox art, which was developed as visual theology. The presence of a spiritual world, inviting into its invisible closeness, defined the entire content and techniques of icon paintings, which lacked the traditional one-pointed perspective. From its side, the distortion of the natural perspective can be credited, to a certain degree, to a solemn, metaphysical stillness in the whole setting of the icon, similar to the atmosphere inside the church. The canonical features of the faces on the icons had to express the incarnated grace rather than the face of a human being. The important criterion of mastery in icon painting was its unworldly expression, defined among people as *nerukotvorny obraz,* meaning "the image not made with hands." In the Orthodox notion, the icon depicts a world in which nothing is worldly.

The rules of Orthodox iconography permitted not so much variety: from icon to icon, one might see identical big almond-shaped eyes, large foreheads, long thin noses, and small mouths showing humility and a lack of possessiveness. In fact, the European masters generally followed the same canons in representing the holy images, but in a considerably more realistic manner. The large eyes had to express understanding and acute sensitivity to the infusion of spirit; the open forehead hinted at inner deep thoughtfulness and mental ability; the thin, long nose, a frequent symbol of the Good

V.G., *The Eye*,1984, syringes, acrylic, canvas, homasote, 51 x 43 x 9 cm



Shepard (Hermes), was also saved in Christian lore. It was an undesignated symbol of exceptional penetrating vital power often associated in pagan annals with sexual energy.

On the personal level, we tried to bring a transpersonal meaning into our photo-iconography, showing the dual aspect of the universal datum: the mourning and the sustaining virtues of the earth, while the image of Sophia was attracting our prime attention. For that matter, we looked for visual backing in the medieval paintings and icons that captured the sacred moments coming from a vast ocean of Divinity. Even in the very beginning, our own art concealed

Reading Light © 2002

some related elements. Purposely veiled in allegories and symbols, art's deeper import can touch secrets that are not on the surface. Of course, it could not come within reach of strictly speaking iconographic methods and its theological basis, being still worldly by its form and unworldly to a certain extent in its purpose. Nevertheless, some art historians and critics pointed out the affinity of our photographs with Russian icons, while others compared them with the images of Florentine and Flemish Madonnas. We appreciate all those people who were open to our message, so we did not feel we were talking in vain. To confirm these facts, we shall cite some fragments of the written stuff and let them stand for the whole.

> "In search of a means to 'transcend the intellect,' the artists revised an old, venerated Russian art tradition,

The Last Supper © 1991

Spectrum © 1996

religious icon painting. Their *Photoglyphs* are vested in this legacy, like the painted icon, they dematerialized the physical world and arrested time. Their subject is, most often, Rimma's porcelain face, which glows with the grace and enigmatic calm of a Madonna. Furthermore, the *Photoglyphs* recapitulate the format of an icon. Rimma's figure is positioned centrally in the composition. She exists in a dark space devoid of references to the mundane world. Her 'still performances,' as she calls them, consist of poses, facial expressions, and gazes that speak of eternity. Rimma embodies the mysticism of the Russian icon. These works envision a nondimensional, nontemporal, nonphysical world."

L. Weintraub, A. Danto, and T. McEvilley, *Art on the Edge and Over* (New York: Art Insight, Inc., 1996), page 241

"In their startling, life-size photograph of Ms. Gerlovina, *Tree of Life* (1989), she appears in a goddess-like guise, her body concealed by a long fall of tightly waved

Eve © 1993, C-print in metal frame, pencil shading, 202 x 99 cm

> hair, her face and chest marked in black with mystical writing... The work [Eve], with its virginal imagery, seems to hark back to the symbolism of Russian icons while sending them up."

Grace Glueck, *The New York Times,* Dec. 5, 2003

> "The Gerlovins have reclaimed their faces, torsos, hair, and hands and made of these materials evangelical media."

Jean-Louis Cohen, *Art News,* Apr. 1994

> "Some photographs make reference to Christian iconography, and not only by virtue of Gerlovina's rather striking likeness to Florentine and Flemish madonnas."

David McCracken, *Chicago Tribune,* Apr. 26,1991

Madonna with Child © 1992, C-print, 101.6 x 101.6 cm, collection of DZ Bank, Germany

> "...With mathematical, mythological, and religious symbolism, creating photographic works of art which are both intellectually and visually compelling. Most of the photographs are created with Rimma's face, which is stunning for its anatomical beauty and for its assertion of gentleness and benevolence. It is actually anthropologically difficult to ignore the surveillant yet benign presence of these photographs..."

Steve Maklansky, *Arts Quarterly*. New Orleans Museum of Art, Jan. 1994

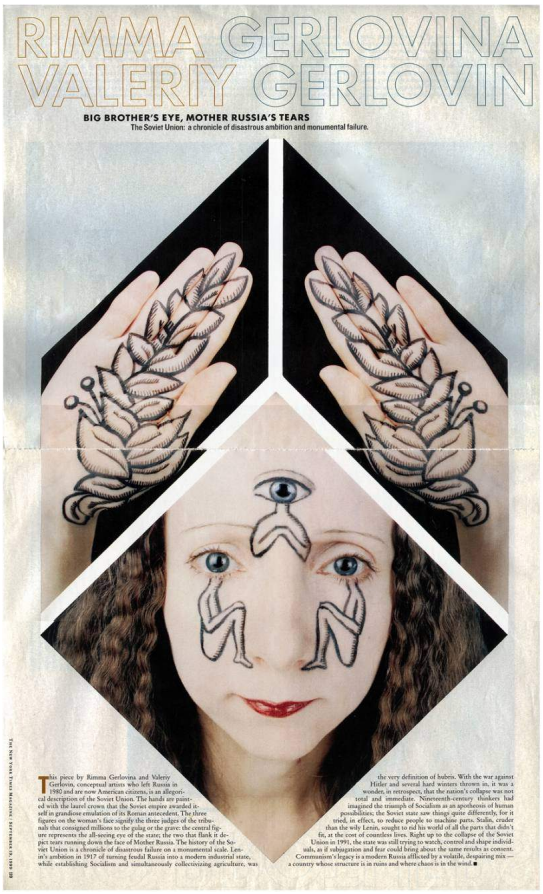
In 1999, we received a proposal from the *The New York Times Magazine* to create an image in connection with the Russian cultural heritage for *The Millennium Issue* – an overall historical vision of the passing millennium through the creative imagination of different and, as they put it, internationally known artists. Note that the magazine was issued on Sunday, 9/19/1999, accidentally or intentionally, which is not known to us, but symbolically, five nines are an index of reliability and completeness (of the past millennium). At this moment, we were working on the series with dynamic silhouette images with fire, but the editors insisted on a close-up that seemed familiar to the press. We knew that our work had to bring the hidden, transcendent impulse and speak a language that was more or less clear to everyman. It was an effort to touch both sides of the subject. Russian religious heritage, social calamities, and suffering were quite intertwined, which we tried to dramatize in an anthropomorphic way. We accompanied our *Watching Eye* with the comments vaguely utilized in the editorial text, which title had a political grasp – *Big Brother's Eye, Mother Russia's Tears.*

On the "canvas" of the face, two figures are depicted as tears, running down from the real eyes; the third witness is just a watching eye. Crowned with the laurels of the "Third Rome," the supervising third eye of "Big Brother" witnesses the latent lament over people's suffering; naturally, the whole picture is drawn on a woman's face. It symbolizes the face of the Motherland (in contrast to German *Vaterland*); hence, the country was called Mother Russia. Since each nationality has its own image of the divine feminine, the Russian Madonna has distinctly different psychological garments from Western Madonnas, whose psychological orientation of

the image is *gloria mundi,* sublime grace, and beauty, whereas the Russian Virgin Mary is suffering. According to *Philokalia,* a collection of Christian Orthodox writings from the fourth century and later, her holiness and purity of soul were received through the fear of God.[88] There is an apparent stress on penances, hardships of life, and the necessity of endurance, which is typical of Russian iconography. In parallel, the Buddha's First Noble Truth is worth recalling: "All life is sorrowful" *(Sarvam Duhkham,* Skr.).

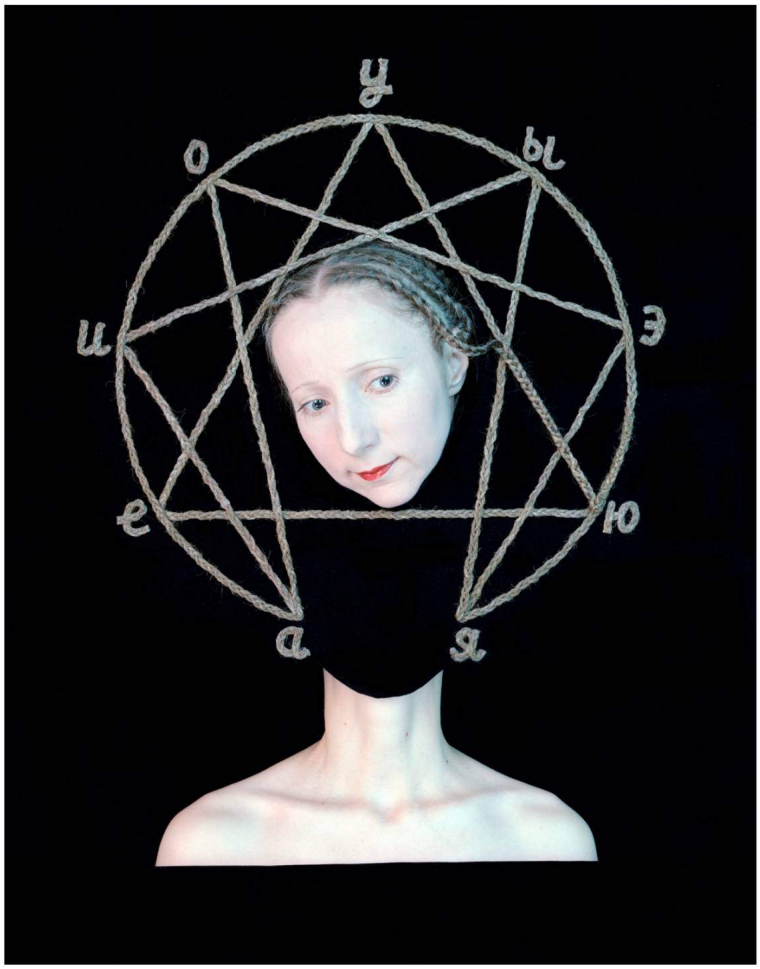
It seems that the Russian character is made of a queer explosive mixture of strength and weakness, perseverance and vulnerability, exhausting patience and sharp intolerance.

The Watching Eye © 1999, two-page spread in *The New York Times Magazine,* Sunday, 9/19/1999



Attacks of aggression from time to time disturbed the lethargy of consciousness. Red-blooded fervor was always afflicted with inertia and vice versa. Something in this national soul was delicate and psychic, though it was not very healthy, with a periodic lack of emotional restraint that often accompanies barbarism. An intellectual passion was equal to a passionate intellect. Historically, great moral resistance has been imbued with the preaching of suffering. Altogether, the material difficulties and lack of simple comfort in the relatively cold climate experienced by people in this country

Russian Vowels © 1996

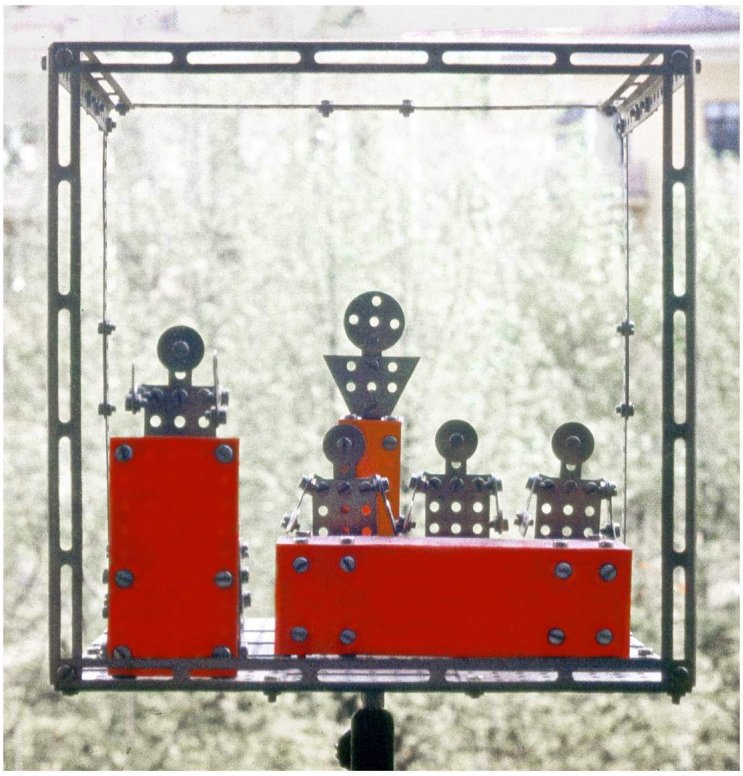


were partly compensated by hope in spiritual support. On the positive side, contact with such difficulties produces endurance, forbearance, and less dependency of mind on external conditions, at least to some degree. However, the stress of penances and the enduring aspect of existence is not a priority of Russian iconography; take, for example, the images of Mary Magdalene with the scull in Western art.

Periodic repressions flooded the Russian state in waves. During the brutal period of Stalinism, the fear that settled in the consciousness of almost every Soviet citizen caused an inevitable domino effect when everyone became one's own warden. The watching eye of the Soviet state gradually grew into the consciousness of ordinary men, who themselves became their own watching eyes in communist Russia. Resting on its temporary laurels, Soviet socialism developed in two opposite directions: one was towards the emancipation

Skull Meditation © 1995

of the poor, while the other was towards the infringement of human rights. Dostoyevsky predicted that the most horrid crimes against freedom are committed for the sake of freedom. Three figures hypothetically depicted in *The Watching Eye* hint at the triune trials, the horrid enterprise so popular during Stalinism.



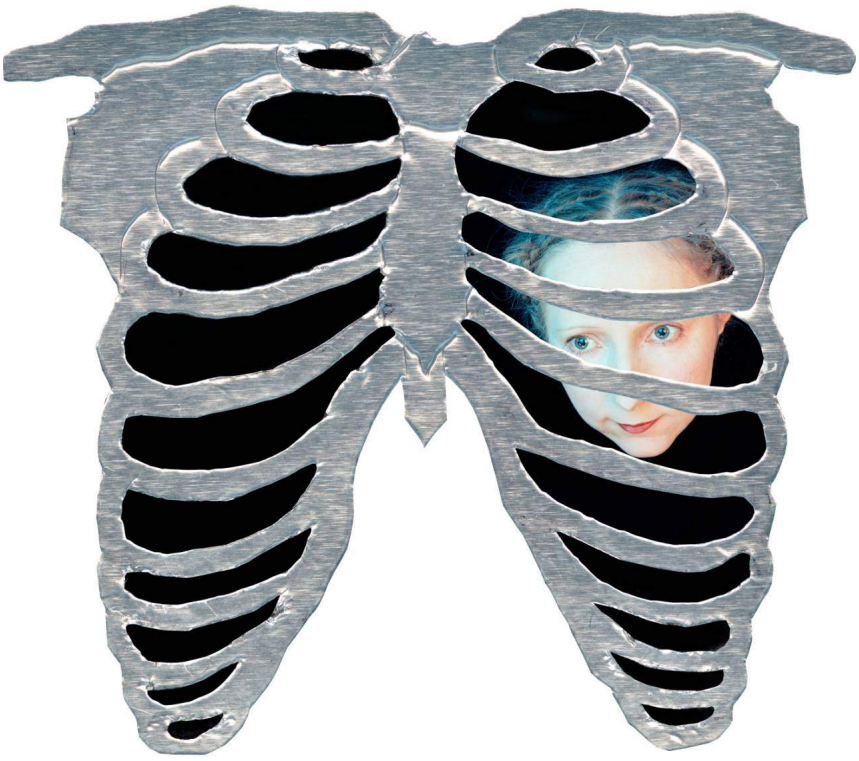
V.G., *Party Meeting*, 1975, erector set

At the end of the millennium, the brutal State had ground itself into dust, and the communist regime was already a memory and a topic for politicians and sociologists. However, mass thinking did not disappear; it was simply partially modified. Breaking free from its influence is more complicated than it seems. To get out of the domineering power of group thinking and the closed circle of social issues, one needs to acquire a more radical understanding than the

harsh criticism of society, which is, in fact, an immanent part of social life. It also concerns the art world, for too many artists meddle in hot social issues, expressing them in works that border on caricature. Love and hate are equally bound by what they are aimed at. Let us generalize that point. On a higher level, people are divided not by nationality, but by consciousness. Only those with a less developed consciousness are divided by nationality and cannot transgress its boundary. Wise men, who are geographically poled apart and sages of different faiths, immediately understand each other. While true, there are more comments on that thread.

We did not mention to *The New York Times* editors that it was also a conceptual rendition of Andrei Rublev's *The Holy Trinity*, the icon that was counted among the most perfect and precious in Russia. We left it to be noticed by those who can do it themselves, not counting on the newspa-

Chest © 1995, photo, metal



per comments. The Triune Godhead is a concept that is too theological to discuss here. Our distant version of "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost" was sketched using visual language with hidden and layered meanings. Following the same rules of the Biblical prohibition against depicting God, we did not turn to the usual story on the icons veiling the higher presence behind the picture of the hospitality of Abraham and Sarah when the Lord appeared to them as "three men standing nearby" (Gen. 18:1-2); instead, we turned to the picture of Russian history in general. Stressing the invisibility and consubstantiality of the three persons, we

Andrei Rublev, *The Holy Trinity*, circa 1420, tempera, wood, 142 x 114 cm, The Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius monastery near Moscow, Russia

spontaneously preserved the difference between the three eyes: two eyes are physical, and the third one is ever opened, indicating the presence of the living idea. All that is received in various affinities, pictured in the transition of personal feelings into the apprehension of impersonal beneficial presence, received according to the recipient's condition. We may well believe that our Shepherd saves not only the soul of the lost sheep but the whole animal.

In the Gnostic eschatology, the Trinitarian formula reads in semblance to the arrangement in the family life: the three hypostases represent the Father of Truth, the Mother of Wisdom *(Pistis Sophia)*, and the Son, who carries both roles of the Savior and the saved. In our photograph, we used the female face as a canvas for the drawing (Mother Nature is always a playground of ideas). The three equals among equals were expressed within more or less traditional concepts, leaving the questionable Holy Ghost intact. Even if we suppose that this is the Mother of Wisdom (*Pistis Sophia*), she is not quite the same mother as the descending, material substance of creation associated with nature or earth goddesses in paganism. She has the opposite vector of her power, carrying the ascending regenerative symbolism with her invisible presence for the mortal eyes, in contrast to the gravitating force omnipresent in the reproductive generative functions of all other mothers in this matter. In any way, it seems impossible to solve the idea of the Trinity as it is impossible to find the finite digit in the decimal expression of one-third. The relation of Unity and Trinity is endless; it is all and thrice one:

$$1/3 = 0{,}3333333333333333...$$
$$1/3 + 1/3 + 1/3 = 3/3 = 1$$
but
$$3/3 = 0{,}9999999999999999...$$

It means that 1 is not actually equal to 1 but to the 0,9 continued till infinity. This argument puzzles the minds incomparably more advanced in calculations than we are.

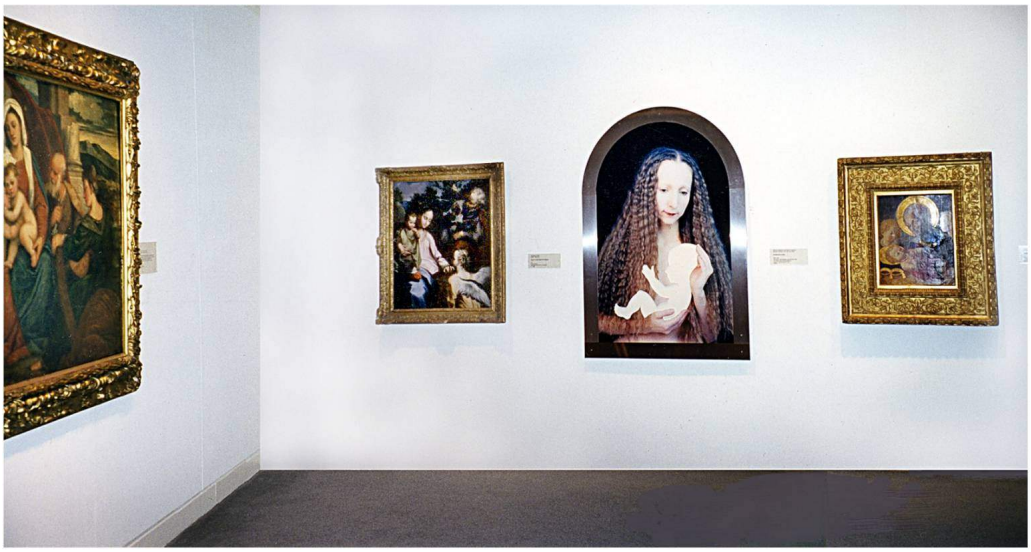
In *Subliminal Child,* the transparent figure of a child is presented *in absentia,* for it is cut out of the photograph. Its absence does not mean its non-existence but rather a sublimated form of presence. The spirit-born child has a supersensible level of existence, metamorphosing towards the divine. This is a part of inexpressible reality, a breath of life of whatever name, occupying the least possible place, and any attempt to describe it in words kills the spirit of its mystery. The concept must be grasped metaphorically. In fact, the

Subliminal Child © 1995, photo, stainless steel, cutout, 116.8 x 85.7 cm, collection of Nasher Museum of Art, Duke University, NC

indefinable “this” does not have a direct physical origin; it always exists, and this very “is” is what we wanted to express and “carve” in this work. Perhaps that very idea embedded into our image *Subliminal Child* was responsible for its rather unusual display at the Nasher Museum of Art, where it was temporarily exhibited among the original Renaissance paintings with the perennial theme of the Madonna.

You can scorn all artifices of spirituality, yet many artists of the old tried to intuit it one way or the other as the active aspect of grace, using all the powers of their talent even if it touched only a shadow of higher reality. They attempted to reveal the glittering abyss of the spirit beneath the creative surface of their art. Such creativity is not learned but inherited from the inner source, where everything is concentrated within, like the whole tree in its seed. Call this “absence of presence” or “the image of the image,” but it is an attempt to find the immediate mediational concept for its imitation or, rather, a metaphysical equivalent of the sacral moment. We can take that intuition no further. It is the very hinge of artists that they do not feel committed to the final conclusion.

Subliminal Child at the exposition in the Renaissance gallery at Nasher Museum of Art, Duke University, NC, 2000



12: PALINDROM

The inward molds the outward and vice versa, demonstrating the multiple meanings of everything related to everything else. The living principle of mutual causality is both supportive and disruptive. Following this precept, the m(is)use of inspiration can harbor contradictory ideas, merging with each other. Such is the madgic of creation by all avainable means.

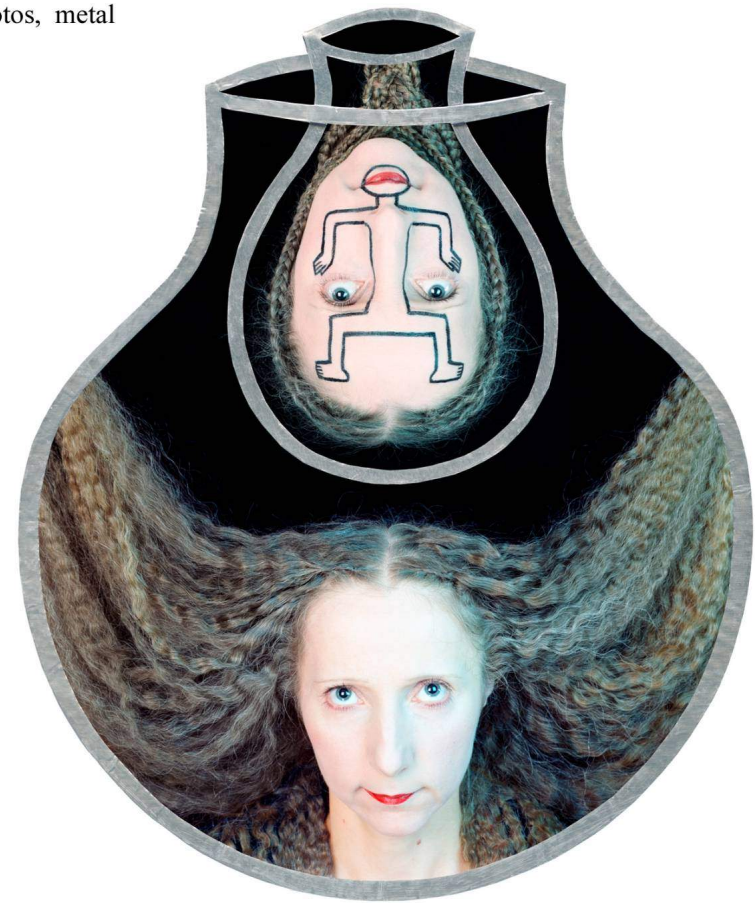
The sculptural diptych *Live on Time* shows a dramatic coexistence of different angles of world perception. The palindrome expression "live on time – emit no evil," which spontaneously popped up in our imagination, involuntarily attracted a similar two-sided metal structure with backward reflection. Looking like an open book, the object combines a photograph and a looking glass, making the subject of time

Live on Time © 1993,
photo, mirror, metal

somewhat ambivalent: inscribed on the forehead, "live on time" reads "emit no evil" in the mirror. The answer lies in the very nature of the question, that is, in the backward reading of ever-forward-going life. The double meaning is transparent because the image and its mirror reflection are viewed simultaneously. Recently, palindrome-like arrangements were found in segments of DNA; apparently, we carry them in our blood.

The backward meaning brings another sense and value to living in time, which can be a vegetative dormant aspect that lasts a lifetime if nothing of another merit interferes. The seemingly ordinary advice "emit no evil" signals not only ethical values but also the principles of correspondences, pro-

Two Flasks © 1996,
photos, metal



portions, and reflections in different layers of reality. The mirror configuration serves the idea of ethics demonstrated in linguistic order to paraphrase the title of Benedict Spinoza's work, *Ethics Demonstrated in Geometrical Order*. Many people think about ethical methods as customary, but only an unaccustomed few practice them.

The mirror forms changes, while the subject behind it endures. The mirror itself suggests self-examination, not only an appearance but also the inner life, even though many live their inner life externally. Often, the outer man differs so much from the inner that neither seems to have any part in the other. The idea behind the backward advice is too obvious to discuss at length. In simple terms, do not do things to others that you do not want to be done to you. Everybody knows it, and yet they still do it. Moreover, many people habitually follow a different motto – an eye for an eye, which we have

Eye Sees Eye © 1989

Deed © 1989

paraphrased into another palindrome, in which "one eye sees another," not destroying each other, but connecting and supporting each other.

Like a mirror image of the image, everyone pays for one's deeds. This basic "tenet" and the crisscrossing word "deed" are both self-evident palindromes. Giving voice to the great authorities, we let them express their thoughts on that delicate subject of emitting no evil.

> "The Good must be the Good not by any act, not even by virtue of its intellection, but by its very rest within itself," said Plotinus.[89]

It means that the Good is not a result of a conscious act, not virtue and chastity, but an essence in itself. The Goodness shows itself in a sacred duty that does not expect favors in

return. This position is far from moralizing but is born from the depths of the philosophical and cultural tradition, which has to be restored again and again in the foundations of modern life with its legally colored fading ethics. Must we forget that any discussion of righteousness is veiled by people's understanding of it, conditionally limited? Every man looks good and innocent in his own eyes. And such eyes deserve in some great measure to be mistrusted. Having too many sad incidents in his life, Dante left us the timeless formulas on that account:

> "The flesh of mortals is so soft that on earth a good beginning does not last from the springing of the oak to the bearing of the acorn." (Canto XXII)

To counterbalance the "load" of the flesh, he envisioned the soul in *Paradise:*

> "A soul in bliss cannot lie since it is always near the truth." (Canto IV)

Who can tell the good from its resemblance for sure, aside from the creator of all this reality, merely reflected in our minds? Diverging from the Christian "anthropology" of Dante, piercingly appealing to low and high feelings, the cool observation of Shakespeare sounds rather cerebral:

> "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." *(Hamlet,* II, ii, 249)

Refracting everything in the focus of his "I," Hamlet reasons, it would seem, logically imperturbable in the Hellenic way. However, from antiquity comes another rather categorical opinion of Pythagoras (as much as is known about him): To search for good from any but the divine source is foolish.

Naturally, it would be easier for us to use picture language, for all our thoughts happen to be processed through our art, which allows us many liberties. The truth is so multifaceted that we did not try to convey it in words, but caught its reflections in our artwork, not to prove anything, but to show archetypal elements. As artists, we have always been wary of uninspired reasoning, quasi-aesthetic terms, preten-

tious esotericism, and all other forms of mental deformation of truth. Our hermeneutics (which is nothing other than the art of interpretation) developed through the visual art and comprehension of symbols. In the world of images, the concept of good often intersects with the semantics of harmony (proportions and beauty). It also appears in written form, as exemplified by the collection of New Testament ascetic teachings called *Philokalia,* which literally means "love of beauty" in Greek. In the same way, in physical reality, the once beautiful columns left over from the Hellenes were cut into the early Christian cathedrals.

Arch © 2003

Different thoughts pass through our minds once we touch that mystical core from which the concepts of good and evil spring. To understand their true nature, consciousness must overcome its dependence on the idea of duality and be free from the amplitude of its oscillations. Only those with an inner clarity of mind and a simple heart can adequately discriminate between the superior and the inferior. Nature is neutral: it equally helps people to cherish both good and evil intentions, so if the intentions are evil, nature will nurture them just as good and righteous. The concept of black is formed by the contrast against white, as the relation of night and day. So, nature (of living) equilibrates in the neutral twi-

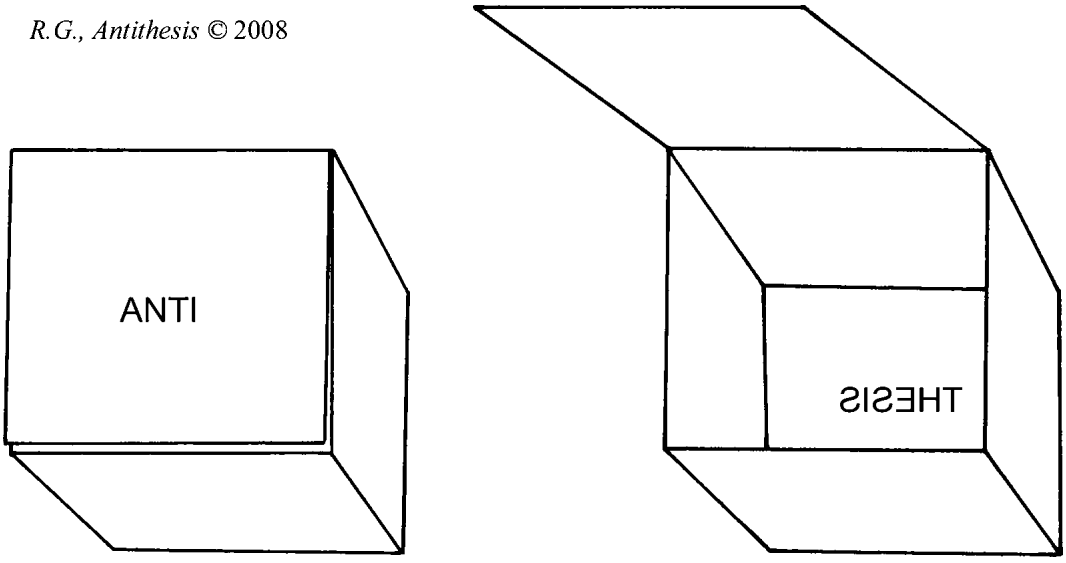
Two Crosses © 2000, photos, metal

Pisces © 1994, photos, metal

light zone between day and night, where joys and sorrows chase each other. Moreover, the vice can appear quite virtuous but malevolent in a friendly guise, while lawlessness can become law and have its way. In ecclesiastical terms, evil is interpreted as an absence of good, like darkness is the absence of light. It might be so, yet that malefic "absence" makes its presence felt in the world – "more and more of less and less." Demonstrating power of its own, evil operates quite rationally through various sources and forms, including natural phenomena and people of a wicked disposition inclined to cause harm to their neighbors. "My name is legion" (Mark 5:9). The observation of Joseph Heller gives this subject a mysterious twist in *Catch as Catch Can:*

> "It is anonymous "they," the enigmatic "they," who are in charge. Who is "they?"

Nature produces nothing unmixed on Earth. Every light has its shadow in the underlying principle of genesis in a pretty fair proportion of virtue to vice. In mechanics, Newton's famous law states that action and reaction are equal and opposite. In physics, a positron is the antiparticle of an electron, and when they collide, they decay into two quanta of light, called photons, that travel in opposite directions. Every value has a counter-value, thus making any concept ambivalent, for the truth lies on both sides of every question. The more logically a thesis is formulated, the more it is prone



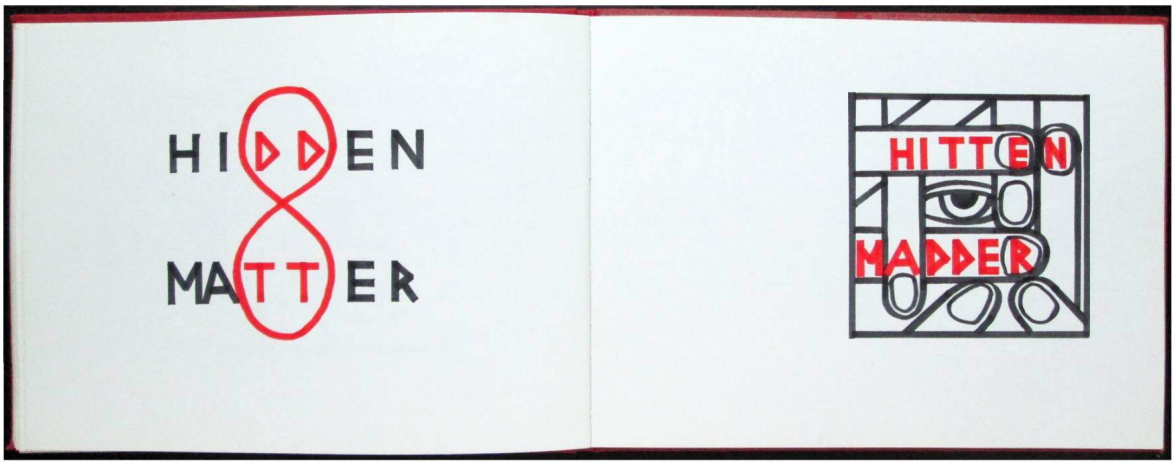
R.G., Antithesis © 2008

to an antithesis. In that, the opposing poles are "both and neither." The good is always contaminated with some elements of bad. And, like everything else, man, too, meets his opposite, especially in light of the idea that the world around him is his other self. The busy brain can shuttle to and fro between one dilemma to another in its cognitive dissonance, juggling the notions of a *thing-in-itself* and *think-in-yourself.* The Early Middle Ages philosopher John Scotus Erigena explored the coincidence of affirmations and negations in a remarkable series of 19 antitheses in divine manifestations:

"For everything that is understood and sensed is nothing else
but

1. the appearance of what is non-apparent,
2. the manifestation of the hidden,
3. the affirmation of the negation,
4. the comprehension of the incomprehensible,
5. the utterance of the unutterable,
6. the access to the inaccessible
7. the body of the bodiless,
8. the essence of the super essential,
9. the understanding of the unintelligible,
10. the form of the formless,
11. the measure of the measureless,
12. the number of the unnumbered,
13. the weight of the weightless,
14. the materialization of the spiritual,
15. the visibility of the invisible,
16. the placing of the not-placed,
17. the temporality of the timeless,
18. the definition of the infinite,
19. the circumscription of the uncircumscribed." [91]

R.G., pages from the album with the drawings for photographs, 1987-8, 100 pp., 23.5 x 31 x 2 cm



Opposites arise by mutual consent, for they are varying degrees of the same thing. However, the two principles are irreducible to each other and must be present as an immense binary, which is difficult to neutralize. They rock back and forth between the rhythm of their misunderstanding, wearing each other out. No period of the world's history is known when evil is not found to coexist with good. There had always been a god and a devil, while the latter might be an

Streams © 1999,
photo, metal, cutout

Flux © 1998, photo,
metal, cutout

expression of the anger of the former. Hence, Mephistopheles said:

> "I am part of the part that was everything in the beginning. Part of the darkness that gave birth to light... And there I'd ride around in a carriage, up and down, in all the noisy throng of human ant-heaps. And wherever I went, I'd be the center of attraction, honored by thousands, hundreds of thousands." [92]

God contains all opposites in Himself, hence the alchemical proposition *demon est deus inversus* (a demon is a reversed god, Lat.) and even harsher one *deus, qui est diabolus* (god, who is also the devil, Lat.). Unity of light and darkness belongs to the highest mystery of creation, producing, figuratively speaking, bright darkness and dark light. Jacob Böhme thought that God brings Himself out of Himself into divisibility, thus creating evil. People must recognize it and try to separate from it, returning to God. You may look at it differently, as a cosmic struggle between that which tends toward unity and that which turns to division. In mythology,

Insider © 2006, photo, brushed metal, cutout

demons are traditional masters of maya, and, knowing well how treacherous and convincing it can be, they alone can see through maya. The demonic illusory power is deeply ingrained in folklore, while Buddhist sutras describe the demon Mara in great detail:

> "Mara: I am the spirit of the world, the generator of life's restless cravings, the disposer of death and resurrection in the sphere of change and grasping... O Mara, lust is your first battalion, your second is called discontent, your third is hunger and thirst, your fourth is craving. Your fifth is sloth and torpor, your sixth is known as fear. Your seventh battalion is doubt, and your eighth is hypocrisy and cant."[93]

As for real life, not many humans are capable of choosing between "right" and "wrong." S ome, with intellectual inclinations, manage to bridge these two notions with a fibrous rib of irony but cannot escape the general trap of maya. It is produced by the arch-dreamer of all dreams, including the dreams of those who dream of him. There is a belief that no one is in such great danger from the devil as one who does not believe in him.

Matter does not pass anything through itself without impurities; every positive impulse is shaded by a craving for its opposite. The opposed poles of a unity alternate; each thing bears its flip side within. According to Heraclitus, all things pass into their opposites. All these perturbations in nature are similar to a once-popular game of doublets:

SAVE
SAME
DAME
DAMN

Changing only one letter step-by-step, one can convert something into nothing and vice versa. The history of humanity is a history of applying these shaky rules in the maintenance of life, when the vicious circle is temporarily equalized by the virtuous circle, for better or for worse, mainly to start everything from the beginning again. Even in the heavens of astrophysicists, there are black holes and white holes, sucking and

emanating centers. The tension between the actual and what it seems ought to be is somewhat similar to the contrast between the universal and the personal, the infinite and the finite. However, man keeps relying on these principles, eventually promising a balance. Heaven and hell are within man; better to say, everyone makes one's own heaven and hell that are within one another. People seem to strive for goodness, but often in a perverse way, doing it by clever reasoning. Take an utter lie and bid a smart guy to confirm it, and he will.

R.G., *Black-and-White Hole,*
1976, cardboard, fabric, 8 cm^3

> "If you give me six lines written by the most honest man, I will find something in them to hang him," attributed to Cardinal Richelieu [94]

Life is as bright as it is dark, and yet neither. Based on this, an ethical way of living in time and emitting no evil cannot be realized in life as an exclusively personal experience, bathing in the virginal substances of the soul. In the Jungian view, the soul is placed between good and evil *(Anima inter bona et mala sita,* Lat.). Concerning the "virginity of the soul" expressed quite differently in the Orient, Mircea Eliade wrote

Aware of War © 1989

in *Yoga, Immortality, and Freedom*:

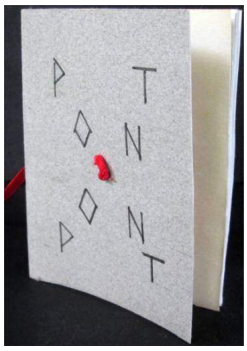
> "There are *arhats* who have entered nirvana without possessing any of the five miraculous powers, but no one has ever reached it without possessing the 'knowledge of the disappearance of vice,' which alone can confer sanctity." [95]

We are all placed in this world with its conditioned situations, among other kinds of anthropos and many more anthropoids, for whom "man to man is a wolf" *(homo homini lupus est,* Lat.). In addition, our lives are filled with prolonged days and years of undesirable events imposed on us from the outside. Exceptional resilience of character, patience, and strength are needed to overcome the friction of life and maintain a wise naturalness inseparable from good intentions. A virtuoso

Latin expression, again a palindrome, illustrates this idea with unique accuracy:

Subi dura a rudibus

"Endure rough treatment from uncultured brutes," it reads from both sides. This proverbial palindrome may be a flash-back in time, yet it remains relevant due to its social accuracy. It is like a labyrinth with a beast inside, and it makes no difference from which side you will enter; you still have to face the brute. The masterful matrix of language shows the matrix of living. Endurance is a spiritual castle, fortified from all sides against attacks of whatever kind. The unethical people always revile the ethical, remaining incurably hostile to them. However, we must not forget about the feedback, the mirror-like nature of life itself.



The surrounding world is an objectification of our consciousness that participates in this process; therefore, inward conquest and internal control often have their crowns in the outward mastery of the circumstances in the "troublem soulution." The other way around is more perplexing since the outward mastery without inner security of ethics easily degenerates into an indulgence in power. But, as life shows, almost everyone starts from the opposite side: they indulge their weaknesses and achieve victory externally without internal improvement. Here comes to mind a joke about the philosopher reproached for being forced to work for a manipulative merchant. To that, he reasonably replies that this is within the framework of regularity since if he were an employer, he would not hire such a merchant.

In a time of erosion of cultural values, it is challenging to maintain integrity and ethical balance. As a product of the symbiosis of the individual and society, almost any person relies on his/her relationships and mutually supportive feedback. It should be added that life in this dimension is based on the ecology of predation, i.e., the type of antibiosis in which representatives of one species feed on representatives of another. People eat fauna, fauna eat flora, and flora eat soil. How is man better than others in the mutual responsibility of nature's bestiary? Is it in his ethical capabilities or intellect, which loves to juggle the concepts of good and evil?

Themis © 1996

Does that not mark off people from the beasts?

No matter how hard we try to push our minds against the incomprehensible ways of creation, we find the greatest consolation in the fact that creative forces ultimately surpass the destructive ones. However, this is far from mutually supportive feedback of symbiosis that can lift nature out of the agonizing trap of predation. The negative principle is naturally rooted in negation. Should it be left to itself utterly free, it would simply destroy everything, including itself. The benign forces are slightly more potent than the destroying forces, which seem to be built into the scheme of life. Because otherwise, life would never exist, and would be destroyed before even coming into existence. Hence, the very concept of good is one of the most necessary levers for the survival of the human race as a whole. The simple advice is given in *Psalms* (34:14):

> "Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it."

In times of tribulation, being "good" is necessary for the sake of one's own survival. In that aspect, man's own immanent consciousness or, if you prefer, his soul (not the social "animal" that coexists with him in his body) is his most severe subconscious judge in assessing the degree of "emitting" of good and evil. They are relative parts of the (un)faithful mirror of the time-space continuum, in which everything else is holographically reflected. And as for the highest authorities presiding over each human life, "God will pardon me - it's His profession," said Heinrich Heine on his deathbed.[96] His last words entail the question, why does God need to pardon us when He was the one who made us how we are? As figments of His imagination, we might doubt Him by the very wisdom He has given us. Precisely in this manner, Voltaire characterized Descartes in his *Philosophical Letters*:

> "He who employed all his intellectual sagacity in a search for new proofs of the existence of a God was suspected of believing in none." [97]

In any way, we had better leave aside speculations about theological subjects, for we can only discuss the divine in its

effects, but not what it is.

The palindrome “live - evil” seems to be a case of gravitation vs. levitation; however, one side somehow balances the other. Relational words mimic the physical world. If we ponder over Leibniz’s central formula that “everything happens for the best in the best of possible worlds,” maybe we can read in it more than a wild idea winging away in the blue. Two words about the character of Gottfried Leibniz, who retained his high spirits and contentment in all difficult moments, especially in the latter period of his life. The inventor of calculus, the proponent of “a pre-established monadic harmony of the creation,” he was in an eternal conflict with Isaac Newton, who was never satisfied with his gains, while Leibniz was always content despite his losses. His proposition that we live in the best of possible worlds can easily pass for inflation within philosophical terminology, but theologically, it might stand. If God has chosen to create this world in His own image, the way it is, in His opinion, it might be the best possible world, no matter what we think of it. In addition, what seems to be a purely speculative ques-

R.G., Dices: Absolute Fortune and *Absolute Misfortune*, 1976, wood, paper, 3 x 3 x 3 cm

tion might point to the holistic idea that the entire universe is organized according to meaning.

How did evil come into the world if God is all-good, all-wise, and all-powerful? Raising this traditional question

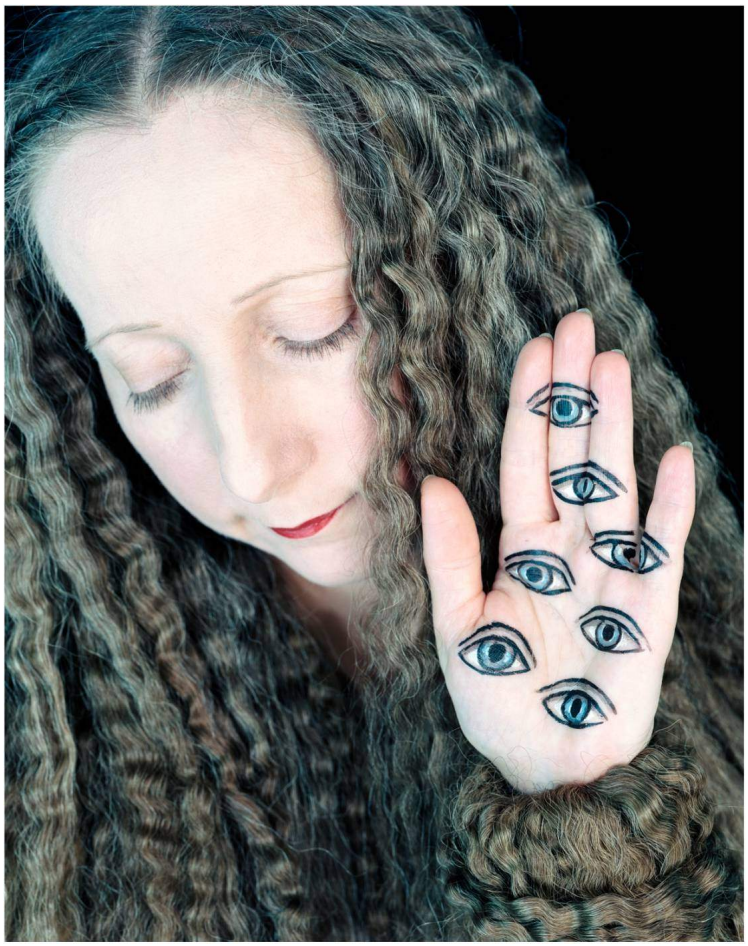
To Be © 1989

in his *Theodicy*, Leibniz was searching for his own system to justify the ways of God to man. His answer was that any creature less perfect than its Creator is bound to have imperfections, and therefore, some error is unavoidable, eventually producing evil effects. In this light, all possible worlds contain some evil, but its existence is useful as an instrumental catalyst for contrasting with good. In mathematics, he found the support and proof of the implied contradictions of creation. Can a scientific formula be found for the everyday reality in which the hand of fate twines sweet and bitter

together to bear the burden of its purpose?

Voltaire made a merciless farce of Leibniz's idea in *Candide.* Arthur Schopenhauer argued that Leibniz's dictum justifying the divine creation does not get God off the hook, for "if the world were just a little worse, it wouldn't be able to exist," he suggested in his essay *On the Vanity and Suffering in Life.* We would explain Leibniz's proposition that we live in the best of all possible worlds somewhat differently, preferring logical negation, with which no one is rationally compelled to agree. What if all other worlds might be even worse? The closest answer can probably be formulated only

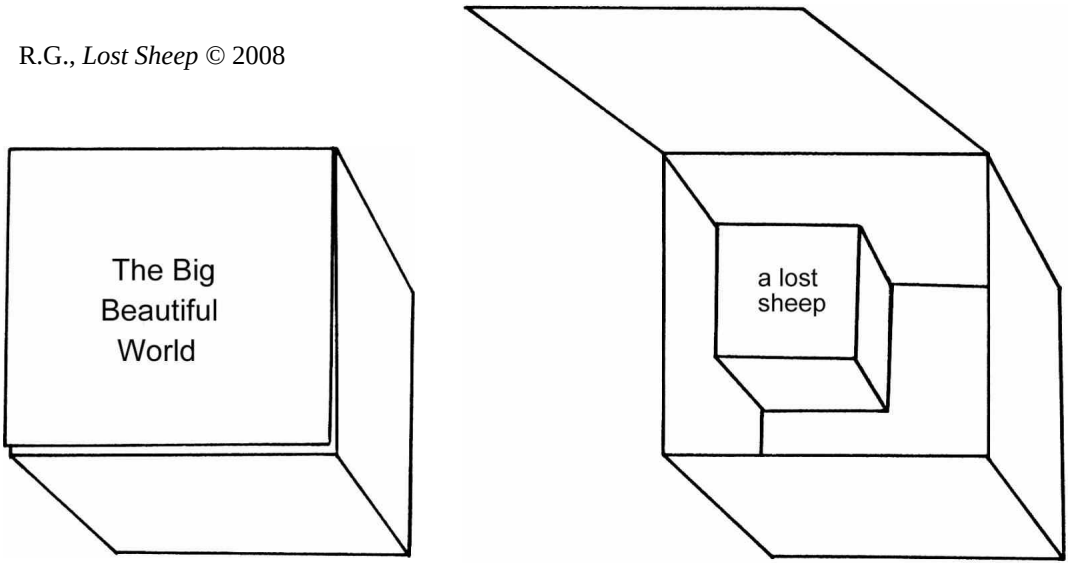
Eyeful © 2002



within the vague creative means of an artificial order that is unlikely to give us consolation. In contour-arguments to true consolation, Schopenhauer wrote:

> "The most effective consolation in any misfortune or suffering is to look at others who are even more unfortunate than we, and this everyone can do. But what, then, is the result for the whole of humanity?... We are like lambs playing in the field while the butcher eyes them and selects first one and then another, for in our good days, we do not know what calamity fate at this very moment has in store for us, sickness, persecution, impoverishment, mutilation, loss of sight, madness, death, and so on." [98]

R.G., *Lost Sheep* © 2008



Perhaps only in a state free of the striving opposites, *Beyond Good and Evil,* as pointed out by the title of Friedrich Nietzsche's book, can one be exempted from these contradictions and casuistic duality of the nature of living. We can replace one logical structure with another or make differences and contrasts even, but any illusion follows its own shadowy logic. The sameness and the difference of reality are

paradoxical to reason, a defect of essential unintelligibility. It is just language.

In no sense
Innocence
Inner sense

The language of the mind can do much good, but it can cause just as much evil. Our mental and spiritual development cor-

Hermit with a Book
© 2006, photo, metal

responds to the "chemical" composition of our thoughts and the power of their release. The whole nature of deeds depends on the nature of the thoughts and intentions they come from. Energetical brain radiation with strong dynamics produces lightning-fast thoughts and projections that act with the same force for both evil and good. Strong thoughts, equal to hypnotism, are capable of stunning and enslaving, yet also of inspiring courage and heroism when addressed to a crowd.

It is hard to avoid the influence of the social demands of the time and its "glorious uncertainty of the law." The scattering way of thinking is induced by the *Vanity Fair* (the ingenious expression coined by John Bunyan as a matter-of-fact of his own life [99]). "Vanity of Vanities" does its best to prevent the orientation in its mess. Introducing misconceptions of honesty, it effaces from the consciousness all worries about ethical values, useless for the ladder of social and material success that brings liberation in popular opinion. That is why developing a sense of discrimination was imperative for those who can set the seal of their own experience on the validity of "live" over "evil." The mass media routinely disguises one thing under another; therefore, "good" and "bad" are not trustworthy labels to stick to our reality. For instance, camouflaging predatory wars as "the fight for freedom" always ensures the support and enrollment of the stupefied masses in these bloody messes. The power of illusion depends solely upon psychic influence and susceptibility to it. In itself, strong illusions have nothing to do with the development of the moral nature; therefore, they may be and actually are dangerous.

Back-and-forth meaning of palindromes can be compared to the expressions "man in the quest" and "quest for man." Almost everything about popular standards has to be reviewed and reevaluated. Since it is written about a lot, we leave this topic to others to develop. The authority in sociological studies, Bertrand Russell, explains why the revaluation is necessary:

> "In view of the silliness of the majority of mankind, a widespread belief is more likely to be foolish than sensible." (*Marriage and Morals*)

The rebellious mind of William Blake comprised a similar

meaning in two radical lines:

> Both read the Bible day and night,
> But thou read'st black where I read white."
> *(The Everlasting Gospel)*

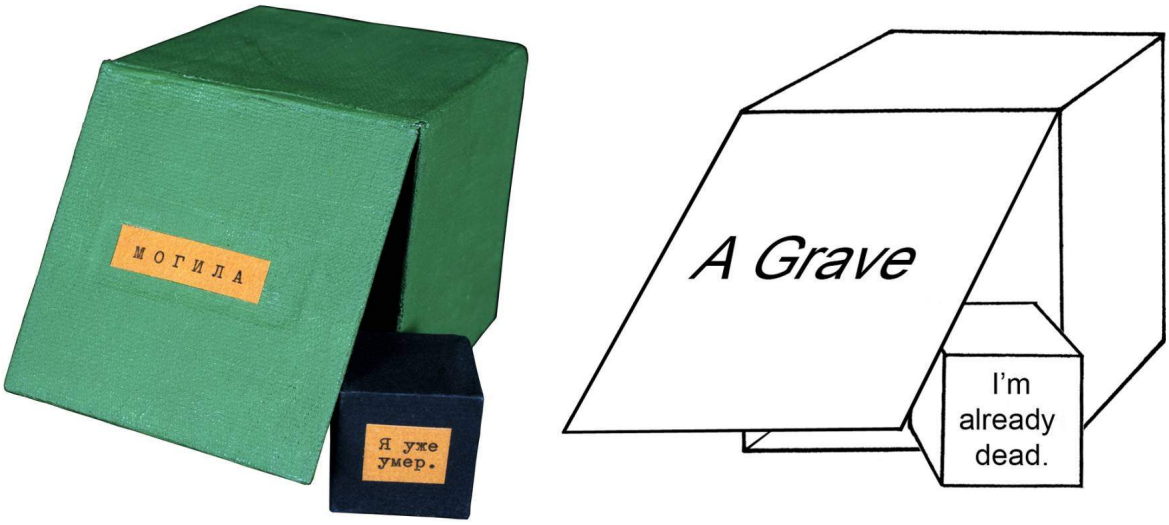
The infantile understanding of "good" and "evil" has to be purged, too, especially if "nicety" or "nastiness" are carried

Truth / Hurt © 1989

to an absurd pitch. A virtue overdone can produce a vice. Some people are narcissistic to the point of total disinterest in right and wrong, while for others, the distinction between them is intricate and situational. With the present-day rationalistic view, prudent, methodical egoism can modify any meaning in one's self-interest. As for children of nature, their

understanding of right and wrong flows from impulse, not from reflection. Much worse is if “uncultured brutes” draw their ethics from the wolf-pack. On the other hand, bestial instincts might be hidden beneath the civilized appearance when virtue is pretentious, just masking unvirtuous intentions. When evil is repressed, it increases. Unconsciously, people disguise evil as good to others and even to themselves. When the wrong people use the right ideas, they misuse or falsify them. One of the principles of ceremonial magic is that one should be good to do evil. Before man’s spiritual inclinations disappear, he has at least to try to separate himself from the standards of his environment.

R.G., *Grave*, 1974, cardboard, paper, fabric, wood, 8 cm^3, collection of Center Pompidou



The ambivalent meaning of adverse events is also double-sided, like imprisonment stimulating an attempt to escape it. The sickness might heal, or what burns might illuminate, which Joseph Campbell combined into a single coherent picture:

> “The agony of breaking through personal limitation is the agony of spiritual growth.” [100]

It could be a kind of christomimetic process when the rational mind is faced with an entirely irrational dark aspect of nature. In yoga, the meditation on sacrifice is more important than its performance, which can be mental, psychic, or even imaginary. One cannot protect the good that is forever on the defensive without irritating the bad that is forever in assault. Arising from the abyss of the inner conflict with the irrational gives freedom, demonstrating that unity is born out

Paradisus © 1989

of strife and despair. The old saying pops into mind: “There is no evil out of which some good is not born.” Each time we lose, we somehow win; the contrary is also valid. The soul seems to be in league with both sides, and it is hard to explain the reason for the astonishing contraries that are meeting within it. Usually triggered by a crisis, people begin to search

for themselves, slowly exposing what they are, not merely what others have taught them. The very effort to rise in this direction brings some possibilities for cleansing the subtler side of a man. Even knowing that something that had begun poorly was ending well can act like a tonic. One should certainly strive for the good insofar as one is able.

R. G., *Self*, 1988, wood, acrylic, 35x35x5 cm. The central circle with "self " can be rotated, thus making "myself," "himself," "herself," "yourself."

We can restate the main idea in different words, such as: before one reaches the promised land, one has to go through the desert, or tumults and conflicts often precede the outburst of light, or the night is darkest before dawn. Without the experience of darkness, the true nature of light could not be found. But the profit of this experience – a gift of wisdom – is not given to everyone. It is expressed in the power of making something good out of evil. Any efforts mentioned here are not navigating codes of human evolution, a prescription, or some sort of technique characteristic of the popular "spiritual" manuals, but an attempt to communicate abstruse arguments to intelligent laymen. On a personal level, the conflict in life may not be between good and evil, but between knowledge and ignorance.

Seneca advised his pupils to "live each day as if it were your whole life" [101] Imagine all stages of development at once: you are young, middle-aged, and old at the same time. Things arise, exist, and cease simultaneously without undergoing the evil effect of time. The present is the focal point,

R. G., *Absolute Clock*, 1987, wood, acrylic,77 x 53.8 x 11.5 cm

not belonging to a ruined past and menacing or promising future. The *Absolute Clock* always shows the correct time between the past and the future, when everything at all times and everywhere is but oneness. We do not mean that each day and each night are like the ones before, as if a whole life is wasted with a host of trivialities. The elasticity of time allows us to stretch it, considering that the duration of "now" is also in our consciousness. And yet, we are never free of time. All

potencies of our consciousness must dance to the tune of time.

SUBLI'MINAL ANl'MA IS IN TI'ME
ON THE LI'MB OF I'MBALANCE

Is there a dividing line between time and eternity, or are they one another? Time has no existence apart from eternity, just as the finite has no existence apart from the infinite. Eternity brought forth time that is measured by its limitations.

"I am" is woven into the t-i'm-e passssssage. Man is a prisoner of time; upon opening its book, he is reluctant to close it. The heart of the matter is that time is a finite measure of the infinite. From the point of view of eternity, all changes in time are relative, while for a man who is limited by time and his own linear thinking, they seem to be absolute and irrevocable. Neither time nor life do not permits man to come back or get ahead of his own destiny, leaving out only the

Book (Time Passage) © 1994-5, photo, metal, pencil drawing, 66 x 104 cm

possibility of mental regressions and progressions. Retreating mentally from time and its linear traps, one begins to get glimpses of freedom, because there is not just one time, our time, but an infinity of times mirroring each other.

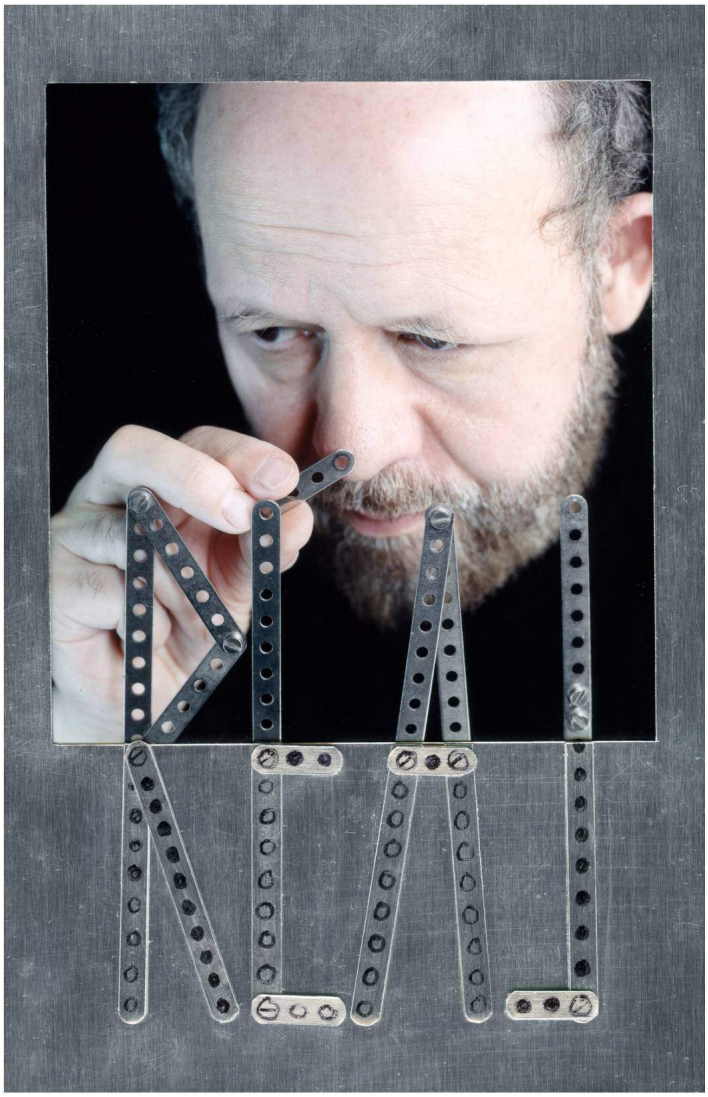
The scribe writes on a real roll twisted from aluminum in the *Metal Scroll,* which is left without words, hinting that it may contain some ideas and facts that make sense to "engrave" in memory rather than a charter document. The words may be different, but the essence of their meaning is the same, which is difficult to convey by ordinary means of

Metal Scroll © 2004, photo, metal, pencil shading

communication. It is possible to understand everything without the aid of words, for not always is knowledge clothed in words. Hence, the manuscript is left empty.

How does one get in touch with the secrets of innermost reality? To be afraid of nothing and not to hope for anything, in complete self-control, balance, impartiality to the eternal struggle of good and evil, remaining in a state of essence in oneself. But even reflecting on actual reality, we mentally distort its very essence. “Necessity is the kingdom of nature, and freedom is the kingdom of grace,” noted Schopenhauer.[102] Suppose an intuition can connect one to truth inherited in memory.

Scale © 2008, photo, metal, etching



Real © 2008, photo, metal,
etching, pencil drawing

Coincidentia oppositorum transcends the pair of opposites, transmitting them into something surpassing them, thus effacing their opposition. From here, the great mystery of life proceeds from the point of view hidden from us mortals. No one obtains a non-conditional mode of being through skillful training or exceptional intellect. The ethical demands of reason and spiritual requirements have to spring

from a deep inward conviction ("ethics" comes from ethos, meaning "character" or "custom" in Greek). Only the absolute sincerity of such an endeavor produces tangible results.

Mythologically speaking, man, in the way of Hercules, can bite his way through the wrappings of matter and appear among gods, being greeted by his very haunter, previously hostile Hera, who represents the maternal natural forces behind the shaky game of doublets. The vision of truth and its bliss is granted only when the mortal eye is immersed in the Eye of the Creator. That is a condition for releasing an individual into a cosmic universality. To obtain this state,

Second Sight © 2002

one has to lose or, rather, sacrifice one's personal mortal eye, like the Egyptian god Horus or the Greek Orion. Likewise, the necessity of the drastic change of one's consciousness is obvious before goodness (unconditional ethical values, *par*

Equlibrium © 2004

excellence) can reside in human beings. However, do not forget about the existence of primeval forces that are supra-moral and supra-ethical, hence inexplicable in the framework of the physical world.

In Buddhism, an arhat (a worthy one, Skrt.) who achieved enlightenment, full insight, and dispassionate com-

passion lives in a blissful light of pure interiority and, therefore, is not deceived by the world or his imagination. In other words, he lives in *samsara* (wandering in the world, Skrt.) but experiences *nirvana* (liberation, Skrt.). He sees reality in

Eyewitness © 1996

pure form in instantaneous flashes, occupying the vivid, timeless moments. He is cut off from the past, with its accumulated weight, and the future, with its endless preconceptions. He is in a state of ecstatic contemplation, unattached to time and dimensional space. The well-grounded Sino-Tibetan customs of morals understand it somewhat differ-

ently in *The Book of Mencius;* they see great and small as the common nature of all men:

> "Though the great man identifies himself with his great side, and the small man identifies himself with his small side." [103]

To go through the friction of the great and the small requires iron endurance and balance in all things. One has to remain even in things uneven.

The yogi who attained enlightenment is indifferent to good and evil and, with peace within, has no doubts whatsoever. His paradoxical sense of ignorance turns into supreme knowledge. The yogi's deeds are neither good nor bad, uncontaminated, whether by virtue or vice. Sri Krishna Prem writes in *The Yoga of the Bhagavad Gita:*

> "Movement and Rest are both as one to him; freedom and necessity are but as two hands. The changeless Sun and ever-changing Moon are his two eyes: he sees with both at once." [104]

Such a man is a world in himself, living in the unity of his consciousness, transpersonal, spontaneous, and free from the fluxes of this life. He is on the way that leads everywhere, living on the border between the world and whatever lies beyond it, controlling material events by forces of consciousness or psychic factors. The realm of pure consciousness is not actually in this world; it is present here as an extension of energy or spiritual potential, rather than a reality. Hence, all the talk about this realm adds nothing to that which is already complete.

13: EPILOGUE

Every artist is an artwork in themselves, and we, working together and separately while remaining true to ourselves, were simultaneously each other. Suggesting all kinds of hypotheses mixed with all kinds of facts that make the mind exercise by imagination, we seemed to create an alchemical visual script depicting the progressive stages of the development of the psyche in an objective sense. Replete with the weird and wonderful chain of references between art and life, the works touch on both the hidden sacral process and everyday reality. The archetypal ideas are not the property of one culture or a specific period; they dominate all mankind. They can be captured by visualizing and producing images expressing ideas. Born from the inner vision, these images helped us apprehend the archetypal ideas that entered our minds as people enter their houses. We experienced these ideas as alive in our consciousness. The concepts are not only openly exposed on our faces, thus bearing the seal of direct experience, but the systematic, diary-like approach added stone upon stone to the pile. Chances are that a complete study of one or two artists may give us a map of all the rest.

Some people understand and observe themselves only in constant flux, while artists do so through their art. Witnessing strange phenomena, they become their conduits for both transformative and degrading experiences. For example, the paintings of Goya or Dali enable us to trace their psychomental trajectory. If that trajectory is to reflect a unified consciousness (not to be confused with success and fame), it crystallizes in a tripartite progression: in the beginning, one gives priority to feelings over instinct, then to mind over feelings, and ultimately, to higher intuition over mind. Revealed in the sum of every natural and human event, intuition is qualitatively different from instinct. To the untrained eye, they appear similar, but in fact, these are two different octaves of nature, between which lies the brain's gray matter. Instinct is below the rational; intuition is above it. Instinct periodically revolts against the conscious, orderly approach; meanwhile, intuition peacefully controls it.

The overall picture of our artwork, woven into our hermeneutics, shows the similarity of ideas underlying a

diverse array of works, which differ in media and time of creation but carry the same fully consistent message. The early stages of our creativity served as a preparatory "blueprint" not only in art but also in our personal lives. But there is more to it. With spiritual aspiration serving as the chief focus of our lives, we have been engaged in a better understanding of the purpose of existence, knowing that our own destinies could come to fruition only through our art. All our metaphorical concepts are filtered through our consciousness, feelings, and our life as a whole. Perhaps the following is an accurate enough analogy for our "photomorgana": similar to the work of the chemist, who employs tinctures and flasks for his experiments, we have used our minds as solutions and our faces as vessels, thereby extending the roles of observers and observed to the unifying state of being the observatory itself. It is like having an intention and not having

Aperture © 2010, photo, brushed aluminum, 51.5 x 51.5 cm

one. In technical terms, this method was convenient, compact, and self-sufficient.

From an artistic point of view, it would not suffice for us to reproduce an experiment on the face if something behind it did not transcend and give us a sense of mystery. The mental ability to grasp the nature of being is tested within the context of world events, the consequences of which are imprinted on the human psyche. If we believe in the Buddhist catechism, according to which a person is the result of his own thoughts, then we see our result through our creativity. First comes the reception of knowledge (visual or verbal), then its absorption, and finally, its application. It is a gradual development of the inner capacity for metaphoric truth, apprehended when one wants to apprehend the creative order of things. Sometimes, it seems life has happened to us, and we are brought together by our identical karmic trajectory. We hope the sacred can enter the everyday world via the artwork and influence the viewer. Perhaps this psychological dramatization and its analytical synopsis can somehow inspire others as well. Each one can verify the reality for oneself using one's own methods. Our vehicle is art. It is helpful until it leads us to the essence, but there's no further need for any vehicle as soon as it is reached. If understanding already exists inwardly, then there is no right discovery outside of this. In any event, the end remains untold.

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AELIA LAELIA CRISPIS
NEC VIR NEC MULIER
NEC ANDROGYNA
NEC PUELLA NEC JUVENIS
NEC ANUS NEC CASTA
NEC MERETRIX NEC PUDICA
SED OMNIA
SUBLATA
NEQUE FAME NEQUE FERRO
NEQUE VENENO
SED OMNIBUS
NEC COELO NEC AQUIS
NEC TERRIS
SED UBIQUE JACET
LUCIUS AGATHO PRISCUS
NEC MARITUS NEC AMATOR
NEC NECESSARIUS
NEQUE MOERENS
NEQUE GAUDENS
NEQUE FLENS
HANC NEQUE MOLEM
NEC PYRAMIDEM
NEC SEPULCHRUM
SCIT ET NESCIT
CUI POSUER1T

HOC EST SEPULCHRUM
INTUS CADAVER NON HABENS
HOC EST CADAVER SEPULCHRUM
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